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NOVELS BY VICKI BAUM

GRAND HOTEL
RESULTS OF AN ACCIDENT
SECRET SENTENCE
HELENE
MARTIN'S SUMMER
MEN NEVER KNOW
CAREER
A TALE FROM BALI
NANKING ROAD
CENTRAL STORES
THE SHIP AND THE SHORE
GRAND OPERA
ONCE IN VIENNA

FALLING STAR

By

VICKI · BAUM

GEOFFREY BLES
52 DOUGHTY STREET, BLOOMSBURY
LONDON

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'LEBEN OHNE GEHEIMNIS'
has been made by
IDA ZEITLIN

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First Published 1934
Reprinted 1941
Reset 1947

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY RICHARD CLAY AND COMPANY, LTD.,
BUNGAY, SUFFOLK.

"NOW for Papa Krull," called a man in blue overalls to a second man in blue overalls.

They were both standing on the heavy red light-truck that had drawn up opposite the Phœnix Picture Palace, and sweat was pouring down their handsome young faces. Papa Krull was a huge spotlight, provided—like every spotlight in Hollywood—with a name. His family, consisting of Mama Krull and Baby Krull, occupied the truck with him. Baby was a slender little spot, not yet in action, since the arrivals at the theatre had not yet reached their climax. The two men, being merely ordinary electricians, were nameless.

The younger one plugged in Papa Krull. A shaft of white radiance shot aloft to the sky—Salute to a Star.

Out over the ocean and high above the Sierras the sky was thick with stars that hung low in the night, like over-ripe, over-heavy fruit. The night, like all California nights, was cool, though a hint of the tropics lingered in its transparency, in the passionate chirping of crickets, in the black shadows of palms. Now and then one of these over-ripe stars would detach itself to plunge downward, a kernel of light, drawing behind it the trail of its orbit; while in its wake a whole cluster of stars, moving in their elliptical paths, would spray the heavens and sink, drowning, beneath the silvery horizon line, over which an artificial-looking little moon hung poised between the blackness of sea and air.

But over the town itself there were no stars. The town was too bright and would tolerate neither the night nor the sky over its head. It flung its own lights upward against the canopy of moist vapour suspended in mid air. The streets were glittering nets, laced by the blazing ribbons of the boulevards. Radio towers twined their garlands of red and white electric lights high in the air. On Hollywood Boulevard and along the endless, gleaming stretch of Wilshire a few skyscrapers wrought their magic, transforming themselves into illuminated ice boulders, into citadels of the Grail, into fairy palaces and blocks of blue-green crystal. A flash of blue light would burst now and then from the mouth of a canyon on the slope of Cahuenga Pass—a flame like blue ice that vanished and reappeared, vanished and reappeared—night shooting in Universal City. At the opposite end of Hollywood, where the oil derricks clambered like hurrying skeletons up Baldwin Hill, a huge, mysterious 57 burned against the

hillside—cryptic symbol of a famous canning factory. All the heights and bluffs were ablaze with illuminated signs and advertisements—a riotous clamour of electric light—Hollywoodland, Pilgrim Play, Oak Crest, the names of hotels, the names of developments, the titles of films. Against an inscrutable background of black nothingness, gigantic letters travelled through the air, one after another C—A—R—D—O—G—A—N—huge, glowing letters, now blue, now green, now red—CARDOGAN.

The broad, straight blade of the spotlight, clearer and sharper than any of the other lights, cut through the luminous haze massed over the city, darting this way and that as if in quest of something, till it met a second shaft of light. The encounter resulted in something akin to a cold blue clash of rays; not those simple, childlike rays we picture about the points of stars or the heads of saints, but a compact light—a light grown in some fantastic fashion corporeal.

"Shall I put on Baby now?" asked the younger electrician.

"Sure," replied the other. "Let 'er go. The dame in red over there is Ria Mara."

Plugged in, Baby Krull hurled a jet of radiance explosively into the air. The beams plucked white highlights from the sweat-covered faces of the electricians and the red varnish of the heavy truck. They leapt over the cordon of police and rebounded from the glassily glittering, bright-red velvet gown worn by a graceful woman just stepping from her car. They vaulted up the skyscraper opposite and, high on the twelfth floor, were shivered to fragments against the film title, *Cardogan*.

The boulevard below presented an aspect of turmoil, hazard, and insurrection. Some of the police were still smiling; others were scowling, their jaws grimly set. The street had been roped off to keep the crowds back, but the crowds refused to be kept back. Again and again they broke through and surged forward—a body of yelling shock troops. A single officer, huge and steadfast as a monument, stood among the surf of motor cars inching their way down La Brea. The chauffeurs, their faces tense, though their left arms rested with almost affected nonchalance on the window-sills, used their right hands only in swinging round the curve. The stop signal rang warningly. The red and green glow of the stop-lights flickered over their faces: Negroes, Filipinos, Mexicans, Germans, gentry of all shades from South America, broken-down Harvard students, broken-down film actors, broken-

down engineers. Pedestrians steered swift, sharply angular courses through the halted traffic line to the Phœnix Picture Palace across the way. Some of the more impatient among them were cloaked in ermine and escorted by dress-coated cavaliers in lustreless silk hats. Another roar broke from behind the ropes. For a moment it seemed as though the crowd were about to lay violent hands on the graceful creature in red velvet and tear her apart—but this was merely their greeting to Ria Mara, the star. She smiled happily and waved her red kid gloves. The glittering red of her gown cast warm tints over her clear, exquisitely regular features.

Beneath the marquee of the Phœnix Picture Palace the light was so garish as to blot all lines and shadows from faces and figures. A pale, slim, strained-looking man in dress clothes was shouting pleasantries into the air, where, at the level of his mouth and barely visible in all the confusion, two microphones hung. Smiling but insistent, another still slimmer man was separating the couples alighting from their cars to enter the shadowless glare of the approach. These two men did have names. They were Mr. Keller and Mr. McOlehan of the Publicity Department of the Phœnix Picture Corporation. They would pluck, now a woman, now a man, from the throng and hustle them like quarry before the microphone. Each time a shout would go up from the mob herded back behind the ropes; each time the blue flame of a flashlight would explode overhead and the spots would hurl their salutes to the sky. The air was filled with the odour of burnt magnesium, and puffs of smoke drifted about the doors leading into the Phœnix Picture Palace. Two loudspeakers added to the tumult—one on the eighth floor, blaring forth music, one over the glass marquee, repeating in a thick bass the words shouted into the microphone by Mr. Keller and his prey.

An emergency ambulance station had been set up near the quieter side-entrance; and despite the fact that the performance had not yet started, five unconscious forms—two men, three women—had already been handed over for treatment. One of the men had had two ribs badly broken, and he lay there coughing feebly, automatically spitting blood with each cough.

"The ribs must have penetrated the lung," said the doctor stooping over him.

"Any danger?" asked little Joey Ray, another member of the Publicity Department of the P.P.C., who was taking notes for reports on the First Night.

"No," said the doctor.

"Are you sure?"

"Positive."

"Thank God!" said Joey Ray. His back looked aggrieved. His back was saying, "Too bad." From the Publicity Department's viewpoint, a man crushed to death was worth ten ordinary rib fractures such as any routine opening might boast. *Cardogan* was a sensation. *Cardogan* was the most important production turned out that year by the Phœnix Picture Corporation. It had cost almost two millions. Two huge stages, a stretch of the Scottish coast, nine and a half months of work on the manuscript, seven weeks of shooting, fourteen weeks of cutting. *Cardogan*—with Oliver Dent and Ria Mara. Joey Ray snapped his notebook shut and trailed disappointedly behind the stretcher that was bearing this man—not dangerously injured, alas!—to the ambulance.

As the car set off with a minimum of commotion down the back street of the square, pandemonium broke loose in front, where, forty-five minutes past the specified opening hour, the last arrivals were driving up. This time the people were stronger than the police. The ropes broke under their tumultuous onslaught, and the guardians of the peace, smiling in resigned comprehension, abandoned themselves to the roles of spectators.

It may be recalled that at the time of the *Cardogan* opening Oliver Dent was recognised as the handsomest man in the world. The Publicity Department had established this fact through statistics and contests, thereby thrusting Oliver into the glare of a rather dubious limelight. The real Oliver Dent had not a trace of this poster beauty. He had a kind of hard, luminous strength that broke through the heaviest, most obliterating make-up. The public, hungering for the fulfilment of dreams, worshipped him without knowing why. The critics kept unearthing the same adjectives to describe him—adjectives all associated with light—"brilliant," "dazzling," "radiant."

A shout burst from the crowd as he stepped from his car. Mr. Keller had turned to him with a welcoming gesture, but the star was wrenched from his grasp. For a moment Dent stood on the running-board, his fair, serene face averted, one hand outstretched to help from the car an apparently hesitant lady. He smiled surprisedly and a little shyly, though he was accustomed to ovations and did not particularly like them.

Next moment he was surrounded. It looked at first as though the crowd were bearing him off, but that was only because he was taller than anyone there.

Mr. Keller returned to his post at the radio. "Listen, folks!" he cried. "Just listen! That racket you hear means that Oliver's arrived. I wish you could see what's going on here. The cops aren't strong enough to hold 'em. There's an old lady running across the street to get a peek at Ol. He's giving them autographs. He's laughing. He's saying a few words. Just wait a second. If we can manage to dig him out, he'll speak to you too. . . ."

Through the din beyond, Oliver was indeed addressing his public.

"Not so wild, children!" he was saying. "You're tearing me to pieces. Look out for my new coat! I can't give you any autographs now—I've got to go in to the show. Be nice now, kids—be good boys and girls—I love you. . . ."

His supple athlete's shoulders, his laughing face, hovered above the crowd. He did his best to be affable. He tried to release himself without shoving and trampling, though he himself was being shoved and trampled. Suddenly he caught sight of a face some distance away in the surging mob—a face at about the same level as his own—a face he recognised. An Englishman himself, he had acquired the canny American memory for names.

"Hello, Aldens," he called. "Help!"

"Hello, Ol," replied the young man, who was exactly as tall as Oliver Dent.

"Can you help me out of this," cried Oliver, "without murdering a few of these young ladies?"

"If you'll give this young lady an autograph," countered the other, lifting a small platinum blonde high above the heads of the crowd as though she had been a child. Next moment the group surrounding Oliver bristled with fountain-pens. Using the back of a middle-aged gentleman for a desk—a back willingly, joyfully proffered for that purpose—he was signing autographs. It was fifty-nine minutes past the hour set for the opening.

Mr. McOlehan pushed his way forward. "Ladies and gentlemen," he was shouting, "this won't do at all. You mustn't kill our Ol. They've got to start the show. They're waiting for Oliver Dent."

Somewhat exhausted and surfeited with popularity, Oliver forced a passage through the crowd in the wake of the young

man he had called Aldens and emerged at the microphone. Light poured over him from the white blaze of the marquee and from the three spotlights, flashlights of the Press photographers cracked about him as he called into the radio the words prescribed for such occasions.

"Hello, everybody. I'm going to see *Cardogan*, the greatest film of the year. I'm in it myself, but I'm very curious and tremendously excited. Thank you and good night."

Having thus complied with all the usages of popularity, having waved to the Press photographers, shaken hands with the two publicity men, flourished the disc of his silk hat in a final salute to the crowd that was being herded once more behind the ropes, he turned back to his companion, who had stepped from the car and was standing beside it, with an odd smile in the almond-shaped eyes, which were fixed on his face.

This lady was Donka Morescu, the great star of the silent films in a past already remote to the short-lived memory of Hollywood. She had left the place almost two years before, after the dismal failure of her initial venture in the field of the newly risen talkies. Since then she had remained invisible, and her career was considered at an end.

Yet here she was again, greatly changed, making her appearance at the side of Oliver Dent. There were many who failed to recognise her, many who had forgotten her. Some of those behind the ropes merely stared in silence. "Isn't that Morescu?" inquired others. A few went so far as to call out her name, but it was a thin, perfunctory sound. There she stood in her silver slippers, their high heels encrusted with green gems, waiting for Oliver Dent to take her into the picture palace. And even as she stood and waited, the feeble cry died into silence.

They had roared for Oliver Dent.

Oliver Dent was at the pinnacle of his career. Donka Morescu was on the down grade. There was the whole story in a nutshell.

Her face was an incandescent white, like molten metal, beneath a layer of faintly greenish powder. The green eyes slanted upward, but the brows lay straight and thick above them, and those two contradictory lines set their stamp on her unusual face. Oliver—who loved Donka—who for two months now had been consumed by a passion inexplicable even to himself—moved quickly to her side. She looked so forlorn, so completely out of things, standing there on the

strawberry-coloured runner that stretched from the pavement to the entrance doors, waiting for something that did not come.

Everyone who belonged to it was there—everyone who feasted on sensation. For this was a sensation.

At the microphone Mr. Keller hesitated for a moment. He cast a glance at Bill Turner, president of the Phœnix Picture Corporation, a grey-haired, pleasant-looking, red-faced man who had assumed an air of detachment. Bill merely lowered his pale lashes. The man to whom he was talking—grey-headed, too—an executive of the P.P.C.—moved the finger of his left hand in an all but imperceptible gesture. Donka Morescu was still standing on the runner between the kerb and the dazzling lights of the glass marquee.

Mr. Keller whispered briefly to Mr. McOlehan and turned back to the microphone. "Folks!" he cried. "You'll never guess the surprise Oliver's brought along. The lady on his arm is Donka—Donka Morescu. Back in Hollywoodland to devote herself to the talkies she's been neglecting so long. Beautiful and interesting-looking as ever. Her hair's black now, and more becoming than when it was red. She's wearing something I take to be green chiffon—with Russian sables—and her famous emeralds. She's even slimmer perhaps than she used to be. She'll tell you herself how she managed that. Miss Morescu—a few words—if you'll be so good. . . ."

Not a single detail had escaped Donka: the uprush of faces about her, the lapse into strained silence, the moment's hesitation before McOlehan kissed her hand and greeted her in the name of the Phœnix Picture Corporation, the barely perceptible movement resulting in Keller's decision to "give her some publicity"; then Oliver's warm clasp on her elbow—"You've got to say a few words, darling"—and the microphone nine inches from her mouth—all the routine of popularity back in a flash.

"Hello, everybody! I'm so happy to be back in Hollywood. This is my first *première* since my return. I came specially to see Oliver as Cardogan. I think it's going to be a marvellous evening. *Au revoir*, my friends."

The loudspeaker over the glass marquee repeated the words. All the loudspeakers in the theatre, all the loudspeakers in Hollywood, repeated the words. Two gentlemen detached themselves from the crowd and greeted Donka—Bill Turner, head of the P.P.C., a giant with thin hair and a big face which for some reason or other looked Dutch—Eisenlohr, the famous

director. Then came the gloved hands and twittering kisses of women.

"Where did she ever learn to talk?" someone asked in amazement. "She can actually talk now."

"From Ol, I imagine," someone replied. "Her accent's British now instead of Balkan."

With a protective little gesture Oliver drew Donka's arm back within his own. He could feel her body trembling, and he loved her for it. She had planned this grand entry to broadcast their relationship. She wanted it broadcast, and he knew she did. Well, if it was any triumph to her to parade along here with him—there was no triumph he begrudged her after the many fiascos of her spendthrift life, God bless her.

"Come, darling," he said gently, and, with the automatic grace instilled by years in the camera's eye, they set off together down the strawberry-coloured runner.

"*Your* name comes first this time," Donka observed, apropos of the announcement outside, where his name appeared above Ria Mara's and in larger letters. He had played in three films with Ria Mara and had been her lover for six months before Donka had met him in Paris, taken him captive, and carried him off to the island of Rhodes.

"Yes," he answered briefly. They were passing through the door and into the lane cleared for them between two solid, rustling walls of guests. Donka's face was lit by an innocent, blissful smile.

"You're to think of Rhodes—now," she murmured.

"Yes. I don't like it—all this," he murmured in reply, the radiance of his face undimmed.

"Oh, I love it!"

The human wall behind them melted and followed them into the auditorium as though they had been a bridal pair, an effect heightened by the resemblance of the interior to a church —a Spanish church built under Moorish influence.

Oliver showed his tickets, and an usher in Scotch garb preceded them down the aisle. All the ushers were wearing kilts and glengarries that evening in honour of the setting of *Cardogan*, and looked even more exquisitely beautiful and effeminate than on ordinary evenings.

"Ph!" commented Oliver, taking Donka's elbow again. For they were approaching the row in which Ria Mara's red velvet gown flamed, and he felt an overpowering need to shield and protect Donka.

Her delicate nostrils quivered as they passed through the

wave of perfume shed by Ria Mara's gown. She smiled a greeting. Ria Mara smiled an acknowledgment. A thousand opera-glasses revelled in the spectacle.

"I love that little grip of yours that means you're protecting me. Everything's in it—you—and the old knights of your family—and Oxford—and—oh, just you."

"What a snob you are, Princess!" smiled Oliver. The objective of one of the Morescu marriages had been a Russian prince. He waited till she had seated herself and then sat down beside her.

"If you were to ask a woman why she really loved a particular man, you'd be told the most arrant nonsense," Donka informed him, opening her programme. Here too his name appeared above Ria Mara's, and in larger letters. "I, for example, could only assure you that the way you sit down and draw your trousers up over your knees seems to me enchanting."

"Enchanting!—come now!" he said, laughing naturally for the first time. They were both talking like actors in a comedy. He was grateful to her for making him laugh, since he was on exhibition here in any case, and under the necessity of producing that famous smile of his from time to time. All Hollywood was here. The eyes of all Hollywood—mascara-rimmed eyes, eyes shadowed by artificial lashes, eyes peering through pince-nez, through spectacles, through opera-glasses—were staring at Donka and Oliver. The practised eyes of five thousand people, who lived only by what they saw, were watching a pair of lovers. Actors, directors, writers, artists, photographers, executives: people whose world centred about the eye, about the visual angle, about the business of seeing and projecting on the screen, or the business of being projected and seen on the screen. A cruel, unprecedented phenomenon, those five thousand pairs of eyes that rule over Hollywood. They were all fixed on Donka and Oliver. Donka and Oliver knew it. They were acting like players on a stage—every movement regulated.

Outside the theatre, Mr. Keller, having talked himself hoarse, paused for a moment to clear his throat. He was drenched in sweat thick as the dew of the California night. The loud-speaker in the auditorium cleared its throat too, and simultaneously a magical azure glow broke from the depths below the stage. Donka looked at Oliver, her gaze unguarded under cover of this strange light. His face like an archangel's beneath the straw-coloured hair, the head that was a little too

narrow, the small firm chin, the proud air of racial purity and distinction, the unutterably perfect line from mouth to temple.

He leaned toward her. "Not that way—not here—darling," he said warningly, his face a courteous mask.

"He *is* an actor, after all," she thought. As a matter of fact, there wasn't a soul in the world who would have maintained that Oliver Dent was an actor. Enough that he was Oliver Dent.

Her face was suddenly a naked revelation.

"I love you," she murmured.

"I know. Because I pull up my trousers so charmingly—and bring you in here on my arm."

"Yes," she said. "For that too."

A little man, attached to a little keyboard, came soaring up out of the magical blue abyss. The lights were dimmed, the noises hushed.

"The first man I ever slept with," whispered Donka abruptly, "beat me."

"Donka—don't," murmured Oliver.

"I wasn't even fifteen," she persisted stubbornly.

"Please! Don't." He spoke angrily.

"But I want to. Does it hurt?"

"Yes. All that's—Bucharest." She had a habit of assailing him unexpectedly with memories, stinging as a whip-lash, of her lowly Rumanian youth. Now she laughed aloud, so that someone back in the nineteenth row stood up and craned his neck to look at her.

"Yes," she mused. "That's Bucharest. And this is me—Donka Morescu."

"If it would only begin," muttered Oliver fiercely, his face retaining all its urbanity. "If it were only over," he all but groaned.

Donka eyed him in amazement. "Puyu!" she protested incredulously. "You're not nervous?"

The man at the keyboard began playing. A spot was turned on him too—a stream of harsh light centred on his bald musician's head. Oliver started as a deep organ note welled from the walls, followed by a syncopated whirl of delicate, frothy music.

"Yes, I suppose I'm nervous. Or worried. Or—" he pondered a moment, his beautiful mouth still curved in a deferential smile—"I'm a little fed up with it. All——" he added, not finishing the sentence. Drawing a handkerchief

from his pocket, he buried his face for the duration of two measures in the scent of dry lavender.

Outside the theatre, Mr. Keller, croaking and exhausted, was winding up his radio talk. " You have been listening to a description of the most important event Hollywood has witnessed this year. The opening performance of the colossal film, *Cardogan*, Phœnix Picture Corporation production, has just begun."

" Will you be good enough to let me pass now? " the young man inquired of the girl.

The ropes had been removed, and the crowd was beginning to disperse. The young man was the tall, fair individual who had exchanged a few words with Oliver. The girl was the little platinum blonde for whom he had managed to get an autograph. She stood there as though she were rooted to the earth, biting her lower lip till its colour faded. Her head barely reached his shoulder, and he was gazing reproachfully down at her. As a matter of fact, he could have passed without the least difficulty, but he was pretending with a fair amount of finesse that she was in his way.

" All right," she said at last, with a shrug. " It's all over now, anyway."

He fell into step beside her as she moved away, keeping a little distance between their arms when the jostling permitted.

" Still not satisfied? " he asked. " Well—what now? "

" Now? A little dynamite under the theatre. Just a nice little stick of dynamite to blow the whole Phœnix Picture Palace into smithereens." Which was hardly a proper reply.

" Angry? " he inquired. " At whom? "

" Oh—at everyone. I hate every single soul who managed to get into that place—that's all. Do you know they were getting fifteen dollars to-day for the good seats? "

" Well, I've got seats—poor ones. If you'd like——? In the balcony—at the side—near the back——"

Up to that point the girl had been addressing her remarks to the tips of her *suède* shoes—carrying on a soliloquy in disguise. Now for the first time she raised her eyes.

" Seats? You? You're just kidding me. Why aren't you inside, if you've got seats? "

" At first," he replied, " these baboons wouldn't let me through. And then I had to see that you weren't crushed to death."

Her skin was golden brown, her eyes black under delicate

black brows, her nose the merest trifle. She had two mouths: a painted one, impeccably heart-shaped, and a real one, rather sentimental, underneath. Her hair must have been dark to begin with, like her eyes—and God alone knows what money and pains she had expended to keep it that particular shade of lavender-tinted white which photographs best.

"Oh!" she cried. "You're the one Oliver Dent spoke to"—as if she had just recognised the young man who, throughout this stellar parade, had bent all his muscular strength and stature to the task of keeping her from being crushed and trampled. "Did Oliver give you the tickets?"

"No. I got them from a director over at Phœnix."

"Really?" she exclaimed, vastly impressed. "From whom? Granite? Do you know Granite? He has loads of influence."

"No—that is—I do know him too, of course—fat old Granite. But I got the tickets from Eisenlohr."

"H'm," she murmured respectfully. "You know Eisenlohr?"

They were standing just outside the entrance, where comparative quiet reigned now. The spots were still playing against the sky—or whatever it is that replaces the sky over nocturnal Hollywood and reflects the lights like a mirror. The girl was once more inspecting the tips of her shoes. The right tip was a little shiny—a sign of deterioration in *suède*. The little *suède* bag she was twisting in her hands was beginning to look spotty too.

"Well, shall we go in?" asked the young man, who was thoroughly familiar with the phenomenon of seedy shoes and other such symptoms of decay.

"I could have had tickets, too, if I'd wanted them. Simons asked me to go. Do you know him?"

"Which Simons?"

"The writer. Over at the Phœnix studio."

"I see. And you didn't want to go?"

"No. You know how it is. Dinner afterward—and then being pawed in a car—and all the silly talk—love and that kind of thing. Writers have so little common sense."

"Well, as far as that's concerned," said the young man, "I certainly won't ask you to dinner." He stood waiting for her to make up her mind. It didn't really much matter to him which way she decided. If only this hadn't turned out to be one of those desperately lonely, damnably homesick evenings——

"I'm not dressed," she said promptly. Any girl in her place would have said the same thing. American girls whom you didn't know very well always said exactly what you expected them to say. Later, when you knew them better, they sometimes surprised you.

He glanced down at her. "Nonsense," he assured her glibly. "You look like a million dollars."

The girl was a beauty—a fact which the young man noted dispassionately. Her thin dress of soft grey outlined the most supple, the most graceful and exquisite figure imaginable. But beauty is cheaper than blackberries in Hollywood.

"All right, let's go in," she said at last. "It's nice of you to ask me." She was waiting for him to take her elbow, as Oliver Dent had taken Morescu's. But it did not occur to him. "You're German, aren't you?" she asked.

"How did you know?"

"You can tell in a minute by the accent."

"Oh! Really?" He seemed inordinately disturbed by the trivial comment. So disturbed, in fact, that he stood stock-still on the staircase which led between stucco walls, under hanging Moorish lamps, to the balcony. "Do you really think I still have a German accent?" he asked urgently, his face clouding.

"And how!" she retorted blithely.

"I was talking to Eisenlohr about it only to-day. He doesn't think I've got any accent left—nothing worth calling an accent, anyway," he persisted doggedly.

"He's German himself, though, isn't he?"

"He's a marvellous director," the young man asserted vehemently, as though his accent might have been improved thereby.

"He has lots of influence," observed the girl, turning thoughtful. Suddenly she began to smile. "Anyhow"—she spoke consolingly, like a little mother—"they can certainly use you in German versions." The young man gulped once and was silent.

Meantime they had reached the upper floor. One of the Scotch ushers fluttered ahead of them—even the balcony was in costume for this gala occasion—and seated them, high up, far back, above the pseudo-church windows. A lovely melody was being played—something the young German recognised immediately as part of Schubert's Symphony in B Minor. (Schubert was a gold-mine to the people in the Music Department, though heaven alone knows by what pro-

cess of reasoning they figured out that his music, supplemented by a little jazz, was equally suitable to a presidential address to the miners of Scranton, Pennsylvania, or a rodeo at El Paso, Texas.) The news-reel was on. The atmosphere, already hot and tense, was alive with the crackle of stiff dress shirts in the orchestra and the faint whisper of fur cloaks against necks and jewels. The odours of myriad perfumes were drowned in the heavy scent of fresh gardenias wreathing the low-cut necks of evening gowns. The girl at Aldens' side was enveloped in the same earthly fragrance. She too wore a gardenia at her shoulder—a gardenia too large, too full blown—the kind the Japanese fruit- and flower-dealers were wont to throw in with purchases.

Despite this fragrance, despite the agreeable sense of the girl's warm proximity and the confiding little air with which she settled herself in the narrow seat beside him, Aldens remained low-spirited for a time. In two words this scrap of platinum-blonde mediocrity had torn the veil from his destiny—a destiny he himself was inclined to regard as unusual, if not tragic.

Son of a good family in Darmstadt—that South German provincial town which had fluctuated from time immemorial between somnolence and radicalism—he had been the youngest of four brothers, the four famous Aldenslebens, the handsomest lads in town. Three fell in the war. Each time, the thing happened quietly and in the same way. First, the official bulletin of the day. Then a report—missing. Then a report—fallen. The letter of condolence from captain or major. A few mementoes. The house where no one talked, where each of them avoided the others' eyes. When he, the last, the seventeen-year-old, was called to the colours, his mother took veronal. Not much—but the shattered body and spirit fell asleep easily, willingly. His father, Hofrat Aldensleben, followed her unostentatiously. A touch of *grippe*, a touch of malnutrition, a touch of reluctance to wait for whatever further misery was in store. But hard on the heels of his death came the end of the war, washing wave after wave of soldiers home along rain-flooded streets. Home, thought Aldens passionately. It was a thought that recurred constantly, and invariably in German. He still caught himself thinking in German now and then, though it argued a lack of discipline and was bad for his accent. He dreamed in German too—there was nothing he could do about that. He dreamed of Darmstadt—three times a week. There was something

almost indecent about those yearning dreams that he dreamed against his will. They sapped him of strength.

Darmstadt after the war—a bedlam. He took his emergency examinations and failed. He grew a little taller—which was strange, since he'd really grown to be an old man. What now? everyone was asking. There was a debating society—hotheads—girls—new roads to art and the communal life—lectures—amateur theatricals. There was Eisenlohr—a young actor who couldn't get any parts. This Eisenlohr had revolutionised what had been the Hoftheater; he was a member of the Workers' and Soldiers' Council. Later he became a director. He threw out the old guard and called young people in. He sent for Aldensleben. Aldensleben cut such a splendid figure that his acting might have been even worse than it actually was. Aldensleben was a success, and success in Darmstadt is as sweet on the tongue as success anywhere in the world.

Eisenlohr went to Munich—and sent for Aldensleben. Eisenlohr was summoned to Berlin—six months later he sent for Aldensleben. He used the tall, dazzling young Aldensleben as a battering-ram, thrusting him to the fore wherever there was a moth-eaten actor to be dislodged. Aldensleben would generally peter out before long. Sentimental little reminiscences at the Actors' Club: "Remember when I was in Darmstadt, Aldensleben, with nothing to eat? *Prost*, Aldensleben!"

Eisenlohr directed a film, and Aldensleben was given a part. He looked handsome, but so did the rest of the cast. He didn't act well, as he discovered for himself. Seeing himself act for the first time came as rather a severe shock to Aldensleben. "Aldensleben's decorative," Eisenlohr would say apologetically. His loyalty to his protégé was touching. He was himself so enchanted by it that he refused to give it up. Aldensleben lost his job at the theatre, but he worked in two more films, his duties consisting in looking decorative in small roles. Then Eisenlohr went to Hollywood.

He sent for Aldensleben.

It was the period of the last costume super-films, shortly before the silent movies crumbled into ruin.

"There's a fellow I know in Germany," said Eisenlohr. "Give him a hundred a week and he'll kiss your feet. Decorative! Can that boy carry off a costume! Just wait till you see him!"

Aldensleben came, carried off costumes, strode up and down

staircases, bent the knee to queens, escorted heroes to the scaffold, and worked his way up to three hundred a week. Sometimes his name would appear toward the end of the long printed list of characters introducing the film to the melodious accompaniment of the orchestra—sometimes it would not appear at all. His name, incidentally, was no longer Aldensleben, but Aldens. There was not a soul in the length and breadth of Hollywood, as Eisenlohr wrathfully informed him, who could pronounce Aldensleben.

Twice he played in evening dress—with equally decorative though less satisfactory results. "Man!" Eisenlohr would bellow. "We're making movies here. Don't give me Schiller."

Then came the talkies, and that was the end of him. "What am I going to do with you, man?" wailed Eisenlohr. "You talk with an accent." Eisenlohr himself, a matchless director who managed to wring the most amazing performances from people, babbled the strangest linguistic mixture of his own invention.

Things continued in that way for six months. Lessons in speech, homesickness, no money for the return trip. That was when he began dreaming those futile German dreams, despite the English lessons to which he clung. Even during this crisis Eisenlohr's devotion remained touching.

"You're homesick, aren't you?" he'd ask. "Darmstadt!" he'd sigh. "Do you remember?—the club?—how we bathed in the Woog? Do you remember Kiselack?" Kiselack was one of the club members—a butcher's son from Heinrichstrasse. Did Aldens remember!

"Well, why don't you go home, then," asked Eisenlohr, "if you're homesick?" Aldens looked at him and said nothing. Eisenlohr gave him the railroad and steamer tickets for Christmas—all first class. "Greetings to Darmstadt," he said. "You'll never get anywhere here with that accent of yours." Aldens departed. On the steamer he didn't dream of Germany once.

Germany is a glorious country for the homesick. Once you're there, Aldens decided, its beauty is less apparent. It was teeming with unemployed actors, with the unemployed of every profession, with bitter, hunted, poverty-stricken people, their nerves frayed to breaking-point. The theatre had no place for disillusioned homecomers. Nor had the talkies. The talkies were still in their swaddling-clothes, as the critics neatly expressed it. If you wanted to worm your

way into them, your prime requisite was an ability to sing couplets. Aldens was even more Schilleresque here than in Hollywood. And besides : " Your English accent's annoying," the agents told him. " You've become an American." For four months he lived through a tragi-comic reversal of his Hollywood experiences. He dreamed in English. He dreamed of Hollywood—of hot street corners where you waited for the stoplights, of brown hills and palm-grown shores, of yellow poppies, of dancing at Negro night clubs, of the studios—homesick, homesick ! He wrote to Eisenlohr. Eisenlohr sent him some money. " Only stay where you are, man," he wrote. " We're not exactly in clover over here either." Well, that was Darmstadt slang. Aldens took the money and went back to America—tourist class.

No sooner was he back than the whole hellish business started all over again—the dreams and the homesickness and " all that sort of thing," as he forced himself to express it in English. Sometimes he went hungry, sometimes he got a thirty-dollar job in the German version of a film. The little blonde had hit the nail on the head. Clear-sighted, these American girls.

" Well, how are things now? " she asked smilingly, conscious of his eyes on her cheek. It meant nothing—one of the hundred little amenities employed by Americans to oil the creaking machine of life. While he had been protecting her from the mob, Aldens had been a little in love with the child. Now that he was seated beside her, they were separated by an ocean of strangeness. Reflections from the screen played over her face—that bewitchingly pretty, utterly alien little mask of eyes and mouth and paint. Staring at her, he caught a momentary glimpse of the rootless, drifting course of his own existence. Here he was in Hollywood, attending a gala *première,* while in Darmstadt nothing was changed. Kiselack still bathed in the muddy waters of the Woog, and a sausage known as *Schwartenmagen* still hung in the window of his father's shop in the Heinrichstrasse.

" There," said the girl at his side as the lights went up. Aldens' little reverie had lasted no longer than the news-reel.

" There's Oliver ! " she squealed, seizing Richard's wrist. " There ! He's standing up now. Just look !—he really *is* with Morescu. The woman must be twenty years older than he. Isn't it awful? "

" I think Morescu's ten times lovelier and twenty times younger than Ria Mara," said Aldens, leaning forward. The

figures in the orchestra below looked very small from up there. You could see only outline, movement, colour—no faces. A group had gathered about Ria Mara's red velvet—another denser group about Donka's emerald green beside the slender black and white of Oliver's dress clothes. Aldens took sides instinctively. Morescu's fortunes, like his own small three-hundred-dollar triumph, had foundered with the silent films. Yet here she was again, fresh and glorious, slender and black-haired, in sables and emeralds. It was like being pronounced dead and coming to life again.

"In love with Morescu?" asked the girl. It sounded just a little as though she might be jealous.

"We've been lying in the same grave," he thought. It was such a sombre thought—so thoroughly German. Impossible to say it here. He closed his lips tight.

"In love with Oliver?" he asked presently.

"Head over heels," she replied. "Madly. Absolutely wild about him."

"I'll have to kill the fellow," he remarked gallantly. But this time she failed to pick up the cue that would have sent the glib, bantering interchange on its predestined way. A veil seemed to drop from her face.

"We ought to be glad he's alive," she said soberly. "I'm sure there wouldn't be nearly so many happy people in the world if it weren't for Oliver Dent"; and promptly retracted it all with a flip: "Oh, bunk!" taking out her lipstick to hide her embarrassment. At which point the lights were dimmed for the short subject that was to precede *Cardogan—Flippy Gets Married.*

Flippy was a creature fashioned in the course of a hundred anxious, laborious, sweating conferences by the heads of the Phœnix Picture Corporation, to compete with Mickey Mouse. Presidents and cartoonists, gagmen and writers, directors, supervisors, executives, composers, cameramen, assistants, and a host of lesser fry had gnashed their teeth in agony before giving birth to Flippy, the Sardine. Now he was making his bow on the screen, grotesque, felicitous, qualified to pursue an independent existence in a series of short films. Slippery, goggle-eyed, pressed flat, he vaulted through impossible situations and was guilty of every conceivable form of misconduct—a sardine to the tips of his fins. No inspiration, but a product of the most painstaking drudgery, he was proving himself a success. The audience burst into shouts of spontaneous laughter, and as the picture drew to a close—with

Flippy driving to his wedding in his own car, fashioned by himself from his own sardine tin—the applause was thunderous.

" And now comes the interval," Oliver Dent was saying to Donka. " This preliminary stuff's killing—nerve-racking——"

She eyed him with mock compassion as she rose. " Puyu, *mon pauvre* Puyu," she murmured quizzically. She saw that his forehead, round the edges where the blonde hair verged on whiteness, was beaded like a sick man's with tiny drops of moisture.

" I don't feel well," Oliver complained, moving at her side toward the entrance. " Pains in the stomach. Really."

" Too much gin, my hero," she scoffed. She loved him so insanely at that moment that she quickened her steps instinctively to get away from him, to keep herself from taking him into her arms—here, in front of all Hollywood. It was part of her triumph that this radiant, laughing Oliver should admit his pain, his apprehension, his weakness to her—it was perhaps the greatest triumph one would ever know. Moving thus down the centre aisle of the orchestra stalls, greeting and being greeted, aware of Oliver always behind her, she braced her body for a second as against a storm. Her love for him pierced her through and through. She was conscious of her hips, her skin, the roots of her hair, the centre of her palms—every nerve of her sensitive body vibrated for a moment to the clamour of this exultant love. The faintest movement sent her cloak slipping from her shoulders—her back was bare to the waist—her skin yearned toward Oliver.

His response to her covert appeal was prompt. He drew nearer, his breath warm on her shoulders, his knuckles touching her spine surreptitiously as he adjusted the cloak about her. Ria Mara's red gown fluttered far ahead of them. A puff of air and the sound of music floated in from the patio.

" Really, Donka," called a burly man as she passed, " how do you ever manage it?—looking like that." This, he remembered, was Granite—fat Granite. A promising director ten years ago, a nonentity now, so far as his art was concerned, he had found a haven as casting director of the P.P.C. She stroked his cheek as she went by with one of those impulsive gestures that endeared her to people. Oliver was conscious of feeling a little stiff as he walked behind her. He thrust both his hands into his trouser pockets. A tiny pain stabbed at his shoulders—training too hard, he thought, after the weeks of laziness at Rhodes.

There was the patio—reproduction of a famous courtyard

in Aragon and crowded with the handsomest people in the world. Stars of every magnitude strolled beneath the Moorish arches. The sixteen-year-olds—the baby stars—appropriately clad in peach- and apple-blossom frocks, leaned against the basin of the fountain. Those who had reached the heights held court. The heads of rival companies thumped each other on the shoulder—since, after all, they were in the same boat and respected each other. Spotlights here too—playing from all four corners—giving the climbers their chance to stray into the limelight or wander casually within reach of the Press cameras. The white smoke wreaths of two thousand cigarettes drifted upward. Shawls hung from the arches above, and the holders of the cheaper seats draped themselves in adroitly picturesque attitudes over the hand-rails. They too were versed in the art of posturing—they too belonged to the films. Everyone in Hollywood belonged to them, and those who didn't belong were non-existent.

"That's Eisenlohr," said Aldens, eyeing the scene from above.

"And there's Oliver," said the girl. "He's left Morescu."

Aldens leaned over farther and surveyed the crowd.

"It looks like the Gymnasium," he said, "during recess. When we used to spit down at the teachers——"

"What's a Gymnasium?" asked Frances. Her name was Frances Warrens, she had informed him—a totally unfamiliar name.

He gestured vaguely behind him. "Oh—just a kind of school—somewhere in Germany—" he replied irresolutely. The ache of nostalgia in his throat again—the Bergstrasse—the Odenwald—the Ludwigsturm——.

Six palm trees encircled the fountain in the patio, their crests towering to the roof. The shawls and yellow-red hangings above counterfeited Spain. Below, the trunks of the palms rose, vigorous, ring on ring, from the earth.

Oliver Dent stood beside one of them, studying it with the grave, intent air of a child at play. "It's real," he said to Eisenlohr. The discovery staggered him. Lifting his huge hands, the gigantic Eisenlohr took hold of the trunk, ran his fingers over it, thumped the bark, then went to the next tree.

"My boy," he announced, "yours is real. Mine's a fake." They stole like conspirators from palm to palm. There were six in all. Three were real—natural, genuine palms—their roots in the earth, sap in their green veins, their leaves alive and stirring. Three were artificial—wood, coconut fibre,

glue, celluloid. The imitations looked just a little more real than the real trees.

Eisenlohr burst into loud laughter. "It's sickening!" he shouted. "Lord, what a filthy trick! If they were all fakes—well and good! But they mix real palms with the imitations. There's Hollywood for you!"

Oliver threw his cigarette away and drew out a small pipe that didn't go with his dress clothes at all. "I think I'll go to Clearwater," he said—"Mount Rainier, fishing, trout." It was a thought only dimly related to what had gone before.

Eisenlohr scrutinised him for a moment. "When we've finished *Milestones*," he said, gnawing at his menthol cigarette. *Milestones* was to be Eisenlohr's next picture with Oliver Dent. And as for the menthol cigarettes, he had brought them with him from Germany five years ago, intending to wean himself from the smoking habit. Since which time menthol cycles had alternated with weeks of wild nicotine debauches. "You can go fishing after *Milestones*, my boy," he remarked amiably.

"After"—answered Oliver—"or before." Whereupon Eisenlohr turned back to the palm. "Donka's an exhausting woman," he commented briefly.

On the floor above, Frances, whose eyes had been pursuing Oliver Dent, turned abruptly to Aldens. "I'd like to go in—sit down——" The petals of her gardenia had wilted and turned brown.

"Why so soon?" asked Aldens. "Isn't this interesting?"

"Very. But I'm—a little tired. I hope you don't mind." It sounded rather shamefaced. "This feels good," she said, drawing a long breath, when he had taken her back to her seat in the auditorium, which was slowly filling again. "It feels good—to sit down. I was a little dizzy. Too excited, I suppose, over *Cardogan*. Aren't you?"

"I can control myself. I saw quite a lot of the shooting."

"My God! Are you in this picture?"

"No. No—not that. It—I——" he hesitated. "They used me once or twice as Oliver's understudy——"

"Oliver's understudy!" It was a little shriek. She even went so far as to seize his wrist in her over-fragile hands. "But what marvellous luck!"

"You call it luck. I call it prostitution. Yes," he repeated doggedly. "I call it prostitution." As a rule, he kept to himself such ideas as he deemed unsuitable to America. ("You're too European," he had often been told, so now he

was on his guard.) But since the remark had slipped out, he stuck to it this time. " Standing on the set—half an hour —two hours—three—all dressed up—in filthy rags from the prop room—made up like Oliver, hair combed like Oliver's, waiting till all the lights are adjusted, all the chairs in order, all the sound-stuff working—giving the cues—trying out the microphones and the lights and the height and the distance and the number of steps and everything—and then, when they're ready to take the scene, when the shooting starts, when they get down to business—along comes Oliver. ' Thanks, Aldens, we won't need you any more.' Luck! If you call that luck——"

" Yes," she cried vehemently, nodding her head three times for emphasis. " I do call that luck. At least they see you. At least they know you're there. Some day—just wait—your big chance'll come. Understudy for Dent! I really don't see," she continued, " how they happened to take you for his understudy." Which was an ingenious but unmistakable insult. She was eyeing his fair, rather reserved face thoughtfully—a handsome enough face, but a little rough-hewn, as though some good sculptor had designed it and lost interest before it was finished.

" Well," said Aldens, pocketing the affront as best he could, " for one thing, I'm exactly as tall as Oliver—six foot two—and exactly as broad-shouldered. All our proportions tally more or less—and so does the colour of our hair—if I touch mine up a little—or perhaps you think Oliver doesn't touch his up? " (Yes, Frances indicated with a little pout of her lower lip, that was exactly what she did think.) " Anyway, the colour of my hair is good enough to try the lights on. And the make-up! What that does for you! Of course," he concluded, really offended this time, and not without cause, " I haven't Oliver's tailor." But Frances' small face was touched by a hovering smile—a dreamy smile that lighted the chic, painted mask to a tender glow.

" Oh—Oliver—" was all she said; and remained silent till the strains of sombre music, and a view of clouds gathering over battlemented towers, and an endless list of the people who had helped to make it, ushered in the film *Cardogan*.

It had cost a little under two million dollars to produce *Cardogan*, by which token *Cardogan* would have to earn considerably over that to score a success. Forty million people would have to pour into the theatres, see it, like it, and send twenty million more to see it. Sixty million people—all

different—rich and poor, cultured and illiterate, swells and farmers, collectors of Early Christian treasures in New York, and cowboys in Arizona, Negroes and Christian Scientists, labourers and school teachers, Mormons and heathens, cotton planters and lawyers, society women and chorus girls. Every section of the country, every race, every city and hamlet, every mountain and valley, every state and province, every skyscraper and shack in America would have to take the picture to its heart before it would be a paying proposition.

Viewed from that angle, *Cardogan* was not a bad film, however far short it fell of the exaggerated claims made by the advertisements. In so far as it represented industry, manufacture, technique, it was wellnigh perfect. As handicraft too, it merited high acclaim. And as for art, God preserve it from any pretensions in that direction. It was one of Director Mackenzie's finest achievements, and probably the best thing Oliver Dent had ever done. Ria Mara was good too —not young enough, perhaps—but good. Only you tired of her quickly. Once habituated to her sadly overworked tricks —the hovering glance, the broken gesture—you could always tell just what she was going to do next. She was "Little Sis" in the picture—the spoiled little sister of that captivating youth, Cardogan—till it transpired that she was not really his sister at all. From that point complications, suspense, and climax developed smoothly enough, and the author's sole difficulty had apparently lain in bringing about an unhappy ending. The public had got so thoroughly disgusted with Hollywood's happy endings that, about three months before the *Cardogan première*, a film whose lovers had perished in the crevasse of a glacier had proved a sensation. Whereupon an epidemic of unhappy endings had broken out, ranging from unqualified catastrophe to veiled resignation—all of them successful. Which made it necessary for Cardogan-Dent, having vanquished all the dragons in his path, to meet with an accident in the car that was speeding him to his wedding. The effect was stupendous, but Dent played the scene so quietly and humanly that one was only dimly aware of its theatricality.

Whether Cardogan was to die or, having been left a cripple (still another possibility), was to renounce all claim to bride and birthright, was still an open question when Aldens found himself unexpectedly startled from his absorption.

Half bored at first, he had been watching the film with mounting interest. The girl beside him was so passionately

engrossed in the spectacle that she seemed to be throwing off heat-waves and sparks of light like a little dynamo. Her ardour was contagious. "He really is a great fellow," Aldens caught himself murmuring, as the theatre broke into rapturous applause over a mere smile or gesture of Dent's. Ye gods, what a smile! What a gesture! Frances had risen to applaud, and stood hanging over the shoulders of the people in front of her; then she resumed her seat with a deep-drawn sigh, like a sigh breathed in sleep. Her warmth penetrated Aldens. She was sitting so close to him—closer than before, he thought. His arm stole warily round her shoulders. Whether or not she noticed the caress, she made no response. With his arm in that position, the picture improved perceptibly. Curious how you grew lonelier and lonelier, once you let yourself get started. The months passed—no girls —*"allein und abgetrennt von aller Freude"*—the words would go humming through his head now and then like a persistent refrain. They were from some beautiful song he had forgotten. He opened his palm and brought it down cautiously on the girl's neck. There—now he could feel an artery throbbing—that was pleasant. He grew a little numb, sitting there with this strange girl's pulse fluttering under his hand—it was rather like catching butterflies. . . .

As the picture progressed, Frances' little sighs grew more frequent, and her weight against his side a little heavier. He took his eyes from the screen once or twice to look down at her face, but she was resting her forehead on her hand, and her cheek was hidden from him. Then the car crashed. She shrank closer to him, and Aldens, catching a faint little bird-like moan, tightened his arm about her. Her body grew heavier and heavier within his clasp, and he saw that her hands had dropped into her lap. He was thrilled by a momentary sense of danger—for this felt strangely like surrender, like the swift prelude to a conquest—till he suddenly realised that Frances had simply fainted.

He glanced helplessly about, then down again at the girl. Her eyes were closed, and there was an unearthly quality in the utter exhaustion, the lifelessness of her small face. He stroked her, shook her—but she continued to droop, limp and unconscious, against his shoulder. After a moment's hesitation, he lifted her in his arms, murmuring an apology to his neighbours, and carried her out. They attracted no undue attention. The picture was too absorbing.

The Phœnix Picture Palace was new, and the corridors—like

the jerry-built structures of the studios—still smelt of wood and varnish. A breath of the cool night air lingered out here—the gay hanging lamps shed their light—two ushers whispered at the foot of the stairs. Aldens stood Frances on her feet against the stucco wall. Her knees sagged, her head drooped forward. Muttering softly, he picked her up again—a frail hundred pounds—and considered his next move. An illuminated sign pointed to the cloak-room. He made for the freshly painted, peach-coloured door and kicked it open.

Contrary to expectation, he found no ministering female within. He would have to look after Frances himself. Mirrors, velvet-covered chairs, wash-stands, dressing-tables—the Phœnix Picture Palace was a first-class house, even to the hinterlands of the balcony. Aldens deposited his patient in a chair and bathed her forehead with water. He was sorry for her, and at the same time resentful. A dull envy of Oliver Dent contributed to his resentment. Oliver worked the girls up to the verge of heart failure, and then he, Aldens, had to take the consequences. The star got the applause and the amorous sighs of a chit like Frances, and the understudy was good enough to sprinkle her with water in the cloak-room and wonder what he ought to do next.

Frances began smiling even before she had recovered consciousness. There was a world of graciousness and breeding in that smile. Her eyes were still closed. "Absurd," she reproached herself. "Absurd." Not till then, and with something of an effort, did she open her eyes—those black, languorous, flower-like eyes that looked a little drunk just now. "I'm sorry," she whispered, conscience-stricken. "I've behaved abominably."

"Feeling better?" he asked, jerking at his trousers. The rescue expedition had somewhat dishevelled him, and he noted with displeasure the red imprint of Frances' unconscious lips on his suit.

"Did that trashy film upset you so?" he asked unfeelingly. She shook her head. She seemed to be having difficulty in recalling any kind of film. Aldens regarded her thoughtfully. "Sh!" she said.

He took her hands—limp, ice-cold little things—and breathed into them.

"Thank you so much," she whispered, drawing them gently away from his mouth. She was trembling now, shivering with the first symptoms of a chill. But she made an attempt to retain her composure.

"My bag," she said. Yes, Aldens had rescued the little *suède* bag too. She took out her lipstick, clenched her chattering teeth, and tried to repair her make-up, but all her paraphernalia dropped from her hands to the floor. Aldens knelt on the peach-coloured rug to gather them up. After a moment's reflection, he removed his coat and wrapped it round the small, trembling, silver-grey bundle of chiffon that had fallen to his care. The warmth of the garment touched Frances to a deep—an extravagant—sense of gratitude, to the point of tears. She cuddled closer within its shelter. There was warmth in its depths—human warmth.

"You can't walk, can you?" inquired Aldens.

"Yes," she said stoutly, "of course I can." Which was a lie.

Again he took counsel with himself. The picture seemed to be over. The theatre was ringing with shouts and applause. He heard the slamming of doors, the tread of feet, and next moment the corridors were filled with the noisy chatter of people. Aldens felt acutely uncomfortable. A shirt-sleeved young man in the cloak-room! Whereupon the door promptly opened, and two large, respectable-looking females stood on the threshold.

"Sorry," murmured Aldens. "The young lady didn't feel well."

Frances smiled guiltily, but that brightly rouged smile was scarcely calculated to vanquish moral misgivings. The ladies exchanged a glance and disappeared within. The tips of their noses were red, and their eyes were moist. Cardogan must have died, after all. Aldens retrieved his coat—he could not in any case go running around naked. Frances was doing her best to suppress another shiver. "I'm perfectly all right," she said.

"Just what's wrong with you, anyway?" he asked. She did not answer. "Dieting too strenuously?" They were the first words to pop into his head. "You girls and your figures——"

A slow smile dawned on her face.

"Yes," she replied. "Maybe that's it. Dieting too strenuously—for several days."

Some seconds passed before he caught the full import of the remark. Then—"Wait here," he said. "I'll be right back for you. I'm an idiot," and dashed out.

"What next?" he wondered, elbowing his way through the crowds. Food—supper—that was the first essential. A

car to get her away in, if she was on the verge of collapsing with hunger.

Aldens belonged to that lowest, most abject species of Hollywood humanity—the species that does not own a car. More accurately speaking, his car was in pawn. Aldens boasted three pawnable possessions: the costly wrist-watch he had bought in the golden Berlin days—his dinner- and dress-clothes—his old Chrysler. He manipulated these treasures as a deft juggler plays with three balls. Rarely were all three available at once—one was generally whirling after another, to the pawnshop—and to-day he happened to have nothing at his disposal. He was thinking hard as he shouldered his way downstairs through the ecstatic crowds; and having reached the street floor, where all the evening's earlier scenes were being re-enacted under the glass marquee, he shut himself into a telephone booth and called Félicien. Félicien was working at the studio that night, as he knew. Félicien was a draughtsman; Félicien was his friend. Félicien was the man under whose roof he had been sleeping for the last two weeks.

"Félicien," he said, having worked his way past four drowsy secretaries. "Listen, Félicien—is your car parked outside the studio? Good. I need it—I'll take it—thanks. I've got the key. I'll need your bedroom to-night, too. No, not what you think. Tell you later. Anything in the ice-box? Milk? Eggs? Now, listen, surely you've got milk in the house? All right. Thanks very much, Félicien. Where *you'll* sleep? Listen—you'll find a place—in some bungalow or other, with some woman or other. Good-bye."

Félicien, the little Frenchman who looked humpbacked but was not, grinned as he replaced the receiver. Richard's got something, he thought contentedly, turning back to the Indian deity he had to design for the plaster-modellers. Hollywood fosters good fellowship. Hollywood would be an inferno for the failures without it.

Meantime Aldens, bareheaded, was covering the three-minute distance to the Astor Studios at full speed. He unearthed Tuck-Tuck—as Félicien's car was known—from among two hundred others and fought his way back through the multitude of cars pouring from the direction of the Phœnix Picture Palace. The backs of his hands were wet, and his shirt was clinging to his shoulders, when for the second time he opened the door of the balcony cloak-room. Frances was

still there. She looked very meek. She looked as though she were ready to let herself be kissed, but Aldens took no notice of that. He led her to the car and stowed her in; and Tuck-Tuck, raising a fearful din, clattered away at an astonishing rate of speed.

"There," said Aldens, as they left the heavy traffic behind and turned into a quieter section of the town. "Do you want to tell me about it now?"

"There's nothing to tell—just the usual thing. We all go through it some time or other—no job—not enough to eat. Hasn't that ever happened to you?"

"To me? Oh, yes. But I'm a man. There are other possibilities for girls," said Aldens.

"I suppose so," Frances replied, and fell silent for a while. They halted for a stoplight. "I'm stupid," she continued when the car was once more in motion. There was a hint of annoyance and chagrin in the words. "It's hard to get started," she said, though whether she meant it was hard to get started on a film career or on that career of surrender which embraced all the other possibilities, it would have been difficult to say. Aldens nodded assent.

"You're from the South?" he asked.

"Yes. How did you know?"

"By the accent," he rejoined, a little vindictively. "And —everything else. Southern girls aren't so hard-boiled."

"No—maybe they're not. There's always the family in the background, you know. Tradition or some such thing. I've got two old-maid aunts at home who are always talking about great-grandfather. Stories of the great cotton days and the Civil War and the abolition of slavery. Do you know those little Southern towns? I come from Fairmont, South Carolina—it's a tiny place. Big old houses and columns and verandas—and the darkies' shacks—nothing brick but the church and the courthouse—and all the people are frightfully pious. It's not so easy to get that sort of thing out of your system. We're not rolling in money at home—my two brothers are at the Virginia Military School—that costs plenty —and I have a younger sister besides. I wish you could meet my mother—I love my mother—tiny she is, and near-sighted —and so good."

Aldens turned his eyes from the road to Frances. He was driving more slowly now.

"Where are we going?" Her eyes, sweet with the vegetative languor of the South, opened and widened. Like

flowers, thought Aldens, that you take with a slow-motion camera. But he did not say so.

"And then you got a beauty prize," he suggested dryly, helping her on with her biography.

"Yes—something like that," agreed Frances. "I had to start working. Dad had a minor post at the bank, and the bank crashed, and we just couldn't get along. I was supposed to be a librarian—something in keeping with the family position—but in the midst of it all I got a job in a beauty shop. Not very dignified"—her laughter held a trace of embarrassment—"not really worthy of a true Warrens. You see," she said, "there are only five families in Fairmont who really count, and the Warrenses are one of them. Then came this magazine thing. *Ladies' Weekly*, it was called. They ran a series of photographs—*Beauty in the Byways*—and their agents went travelling around to all the small towns, hunting for nice-looking girls. Then my photograph appeared in the magazine—in a bathing-suit—not very dignified either. I got the funniest letters—proposals and things like that. And finally the magazine sent ten of the girls they'd discovered to Hollywood at their expense. Grand publicity for them. The girls all went to the dogs."

"Did *you* go to the dogs?" asked Aldens quickly.

"Well—not entirely, perhaps—yet. When I first got here, they gave me a few tests and told me my hair didn't photograph well. So I dyed it. Then it was my mouth. Then I hadn't enough temperament. I gave one fellow a box on the ears, and that was too much temperament. But the other thing isn't true either—that you can have a career if you're willing to sleep with every Tom, Dick, and Harry. That only makes matters worse. I soon realised I'd better start learning things, first of all—dancing, singing, speaking. I didn't mind the work—but, Lord! paying for the lessons! Finally, I did land a job as extra, and three weeks later I landed another. Well—try living on that seven fifty! Make-up and having your hair bleached every week and hiring clothes for society scenes. The rest of the time you spend sitting in your room, writing letters home: 'Dear Mother, everything's fine, I'm going to land a real part soon.' You're ashamed to write anything else. What's the good of breaking their hearts too? They couldn't send you your fare home, anyway. After all, the boys have to be thought of first—so you just sit and wait."

She paused for a moment to stare at the road unwinding

before them between the plumed branches of pepper trees, for Félicien's house lay in a kind of canyon beyond the town. Then she went on.

"The telephone's the worst thing," she said. "Sitting and waiting in your room every day from four to seven, when the Central Casting Office sends out calls for extras—sitting and waiting and hoping. And then, if anyone does call, it's sure to be the milkman about the bill. But that's an old story. We've all been through it. I suppose you've been through it too, haven't you? Sitting in your room and waiting and waiting and waiting? If you have a room, of course—if you have a telephone."

"Haven't you a room?" asked Aldens, who *had* been through it.

"I—oh, yes. The last place I lived in—spent the night in, rather—was a room behind a filling station. But the police put a stop to that. You know that regulation—living on premises where business is conducted, or some such thing. I'm living with Kit Dallas now. She's one of the ten girls. She's gone to the dogs all right, but she knows how to take care of herself. Kit's a hard-boiled baby. It's easy, I suppose, if you just know how. You ought to meet Kit.

"If only," she said a little later, "I were as far along as Kit is. I don't mean a career—I mean the other thing. It's getting started—you know—it's that first time. You'd like the first time to be something that isn't all messy and rotten. The first time really belongs to yourself—there ought to be something sweet about it—not just a business deal. Then—after that—for all I care——"

"And," Aldens said, driving carefully, his eyes glued to the road, "there's been no first time yet?"

"No," replied Frances quickly, as though there were something important that she wanted settled between them once for all.

"And meantime," he concluded, smiling, "you're mad about Oliver Dent."

"Yes. 'Every little girl has a little dream,'" she hummed from a current song hit. "I'm not specially anxious," she added, "to wind up at Florence's."

Florence was the woman who owned most of the night clubs and places of amusement in Los Angeles. And as a side line she conducted a discreet little business whose stock-in-trade was young girls. Men would call her up, price, height, and type would be specified, and the girl dispatched to the gentle-

man's house. Blessed with humour and an understanding of the heart of man, Florence was the bachelor's solace and the final refuge of the lovely, jobless extras of Hollywood. Everyone knew her. Aldens knew her, too—he recalled an evening he had spent in one of her establishments. Nowhere in the world was the business of vice more decorously, more scrupulously, more systematically conducted than under Florence's management. Aldens was swept by a flood of pity for this child. He was a little in love with her, too, but the tiny flame kindled by her beauty was drowned in compassion.

"You're not yourself to-day," he comforted her. "You'll have your courage back by to-morrow."

"Oh, I've got courage all right," she replied almost wonderingly. They were climbing uphill now to the accompaniment of the car's resentful clatter. Then they swung into darkness, where the odour of damp foliage greeted them—an odour rare in Hollywood. Aldens brought the car to a halt.

"But where are you taking me?" asked Frances.

"I live here—with a friend. First of all," he said firmly, "I'm going to make you some scrambled eggs. And then we'll see."

It was a tiny, bizarre-looking house whose door he opened—a two-storey house, each storey consisting of a single room—really more like a little turret than a house. It lay at the mouth of a small ravine, whose trees reared their lofty crests and scalloped leaves to the windows. Aldens dashed into the kitchen, leaving Frances to sniff about the living-room. Its appointments reflected a kind of ordered madness. Metal furniture, magical lighting effects in tubular form—home-made—Javanese *batiks*, books, a draughtsman's table near the window, a parrot sleeping on a perch. Frances woke him up, but he could talk only French. "*Fiche moi la paix*," he said, which she took to be an expression of civility.

By the time Aldens appeared with the scrambled eggs and toast, Frances had made herself at home. She had found the cigarettes, turned on the gramophone, and unearthed the remnant of California Chianti in the wall niche. For all its air of European Bohemianism, the room had taken on something unaccountably American through Frances' mere presence. After all, it was nice having a girl sitting on the couch. It made the couch look cosier, Aldens decided. He watched contentedly as she ate—her movements fastidious and restrained, despite the fact that an hour ago she had fainted of hunger.

There it was again—that sense of responsibility and commiseration for this utter stranger—this little comrade in misfortune.

"I can take you home later," he offered. "Where is your place?"

"My place," she mocked, "would be on Orange Drive, right near Highland Avenue. The only problem is that Kit can't use me at the place to-night."

There was a moment's silence. Then: "You can spend the night here," Aldens told her. "The bedroom's upstairs. My friend's not coming home."

Frances hesitated—for the fraction of a second. "And where will you sleep?" she asked.

"Where I always sleep—down here on the couch."

She thought this over. He noticed that the gardenia at her shoulder was all withered, the edges of its petals curled up and turning brown. The whole room reeked of the scent of fading gardenia. Frances was scrutinising him with the innocent eyes of an animal. They were circled with cheap eye-shadow, the waxed lashes stood out stiffly like little bristles, and the mascara was smudged. Nevertheless, they were innocent eyes.

"Thank you," she said, "you're awfully kind," and stretched her hand to him across the little table. As he went upstairs to prepare her bed, the absurdity of the situation never once occurred to him.

"Boys," cried Sam Houston, of the executive board of the P.P.C., entering a room on the second floor of the 111 Club, where a poker game was in progress at three in the morning—"Boys, what a night! Never—if I live to be as old as Laemmle, Senior—never will I forget it. Give us a 'mixed,' Henry. Well, there's no question about it—Donka's back among us—back a hundred per cent.—and if anyone says to me, Donka's through—then I say—I, Sam Houston—that Donka's staging a come-back—and what's more, it'll be a good one. Any takers? The whole publicity gang's gone mad—ask Keller—McOlehan's moaning for a couple of weeks at Palm Springs to get his nerves in shape—and little Joey Ray's completely sunk. Who's responsible? Bill's responsible—Bill himself. You know the front office—works itself up into a cock-eyed stew before every big *première*—and Bill Turner's the damnedest old woman that ever ran a company. That's because of his kidneys. Another 'mixed,' Henry.

Sure, I'm a little drunk, but I'm telling you the truth. So Bill—superstitious as usual—says he won't make any arrangements for a dinner after the show. Since that time *The Smiling Fool* flopped and he found himself stuck at the Ambassador with a dinner for a hundred and eighty and nobody there but the Board and two baby stars who didn't even know what French champagne tasted like—since then Bill orders no dinners till he knows where he's at. So when the riot broke—somewhere towards the end of the picture where Oliver finds that his arm's been amputated—Bill slips over to Keller and me and starts whispering to us to order dinner at the Ambassador and dig up some booze and get the crowd together—just a handful—not more than thirty. O.K. —we phone the Ambassador—we phone Light for three cases —and then we start passing out invitations, just offhand, you know, to the triumphal feast. When I get round to Oliver and whisper my little speech, he pulls that rabbit's face of his—you know—with his upper lip—exceedingly British, haw! 'I'll be glad to come,' he says, 'if Donka would care about it.' And Donka—hundred per cent.—pipes up: 'I'd love it—but only on condition that I shan't meet Ria Mara there.' 'Donka,' I say, 'my angel,' I say, 'after all, Ria Mara's the star to-night—we can't very well forbid her to come to the dinner. You're a guest—a very welcome guest, to be sure—we're all enchanted to see you again, and that black hair's marvellously becoming—but naturally Ria Mara's going to be at the dinner.'

"'Very well,' says Donka, 'then I won't be. I've always preferred tête-à-tête dinners, anyway,' and off she sails, with Oliver in tow. Meantime Ria Mara's been whisked away to the Ambassador in Bill's car. I get hold of Bill. 'Oliver's not coming,' I tell him, 'because——' thus and thus and so and so. Well—you know Bill when he gets pigheaded. Another 'mixed,' Henry. 'If Oliver's not coming,' he booms, 'it's all off!' Napoleon himself. I hang on to Oliver's coat-tails—I try to talk sense to Donka. Ever played poker with Donka?—no? Well, she's a tough player, and Oliver's a fine card in her hand. Finally—it was almost midnight—I get them both to the Ambassador by main force. They had a little bar set up outside the Yellow Room, and the boys were standing around consoling themselves while they waited. Ria was sober as a judge—you know Ria—she's got ideas—no drinking, no smoking, 82 calories to a meal—no more, no less. Now we'll see some fun, I say to myself—

Ria's nitro-glycerine and Donka's fire—just watch the explosion when they get together. But Donka won't go in, and Ria won't come out—and Oliver—— Never in your life, I'm telling you—never in your life have you seen such an exhibition of charm. The rascal sticks close to Donka—she must have him doped. Old, you say? Donka—let's see—I came here with Bill nineteen years ago—don't worry—I'm not going to tell you how we started in a shack—God, what a hole this place was in those days!—how it stank!—and that everlasting outdoor shooting—and shying horses in every single film we made—— Oh, yes—Donka. Well, we dug her out of a show in Chicago—seventeen she was then, as God's my judge. The woman's not a day over thirty-six, and she looks twenty-four. And if she doesn't want to sit at the same table with Ria Mara, who can blame her? Because it was Ria and nobody else who started the tale that Donka was fifty-six, and she put that *Observer* fellow up to calling Donka 'an old veteran,' aside from the fact that she wangled the prince away from her—the only one of her husbands Donka ever gave a damn about. No, I'm not taking sides—absolutely not—another 'mixed,' Henry—but if you'd seen them together to-day—one in bright red, the other in bright green—Ria like a cold fish with flat feet, and Donka looking as though she'd hiss if a drop of water touched her—then you'd have to admit that Morescu's still worth her five thousand a week. And take it from Papa Sam, children, she's going to get it—her five thousand. Good God, what a show they put on, those two! It was stupendous! If you could only get the brutes steamed up like that in front of the camera. And all the time there was hardly a thing you could lay your finger on. Ria leaning against the bar, her cheeks getting redder and redder, because she kept getting whiter and whiter under her make-up—till finally you couldn't see anything but a couple of triangular red patches like a clown's and Ria smiling. And nobody'd sit down to dinner till the thing was settled. Meantime Donka's out in the lobby, showing off her sables and emeralds, and waiting. And one by one they all drift out to her. Finally, Bill himself goes out, and Ria's left high and dry at the bar except for little Joey Ray, who sticks to the bitter end. I saw him—with a wilting collar that was a disgrace to a gentleman's neck.

"Finally, Oliver marches himself in. Fellows, you should have seen the son-of-a-gun—innocent as a gazelle—starts chatting with Ria, takes her arm, goes for her coat. 'Ria's

tired,' he says. 'Poor little girl,' he says. 'I'll take her home and come back again,' he says, and pushes her out to the car. 'We're heartbroken,' he says, 'to have her go, but we can't keep her by force.' That's Oliver for you. Low-down? There's just where you're wrong. There's nothing low-down about Oliver. Maybe he kissed her in the car—who knows? Maybe that's all she's been dreaming of for three months—that Oliver might kiss her again some day. Maybe ten minutes alone with him was worth the whole of Bill's party to her. Women are queer beasts, and we haven't got to the bottom of their peculiarities yet. Another 'mixed,' Henry. Maybe Ria played the meek angel because Donka's an autocrat. Why does one wear red and the other green? Why is one dead sober and the other generally drunk? Why are they forever falling in love with the same man and wanting to play the same parts, though they're different as day and night? And that, little ones, is what's known in the Writers' Department as the 'mystery of the feminine soul.'

"Anyway, Donka had her triumph—and almost choked on it—like trying to swallow a bonbon too big for her gullet. Well—judge for yourselves—she takes Ria Mara's man away from her. Man! What do you mean?—man! Oliver! The best man in Hollywood, in the country, in the world. She drives Ria from her own party, from her own triumph after her own *première*. Ria goes home, and Oliver's back in ten minutes, and as Ria neither drinks nor dopes, don't ask me how she got over it. And Donka sits there in Ria's place between Oliver and Bill, and nobody dares so much as open his trap about it. And with Bill mooning round her like a calf, I wouldn't be surprised if the next thing she gets is a new contract.

"And now I'll tell you what I mean by 'Donka hundred per cent.' I know Donka, don't I?—I've known her since those days in the shack when we first broke ground out here—and I know what it means when her nostrils start sort of quivering, and her slant-eyes get sort of heavy, and her mouth—well, never mind, you know what I mean. She gets that look in the films once in a while when she's at her best. To put it in a word, I know just how crazy she is about Oliver, God bless her. So my lady trifles with an oyster—by the time the soup comes she's off in the clouds somewhere—and before the fowl's served, up she gets: 'Thank you, Bill—such a charming evening—but I've got to be going home now. I've a long way to drive—I live at the beach. Oliver will see me

home.' And Oliver jumps up, beautiful as an angel, smiles that disarming smile of his, and murmurs, quite the English aristocrat: 'Do forgive me—I'll take Miss Morescu home and then come back—we can meet later at the 111 Club.' And down the middle of the room he marches with Donka. I'd like to see what the morning papers are going to do with it.

"You think he's nuts? H'm—I suppose he is—and none of us'd mind being nuts in exactly the same way. But do you realise, you nitwits, what a woman's worth to the films who can drive a man like Oliver loony? Because you know as well as I do that Oliver's a great lover only on the screen. New light on the subject, hey? Will he be back at the Club to-night? Go on with your game—pardon the interruption. No—no 'mixed,' Henry—plain whisky.

"Well, if you ask me—me, Sam Houston, who was here when Bill Turner put up his first shack in Hollywood—I'm telling you: No—he won't be back at the Club to-night."

"Stop the car," said Oliver. "I want to drive." They had just crossed Santa Monica Boulevard, where the little illuminated fountain plays, and were turning into a cooler, more open section. Already there was a hint of iodine and seaweed and the Pacific in the air.

"No—don't—why?" asked Donka, roused from the poignant delight of lips buried deep in Oliver's palm.

"Please. I'm a little drunk, Donka. I'd like to get my head cleared."

"I love it," she said, laughing softly, "when you're a little drunk."

"Stop, Meyer," called Oliver, and the brakes screamed as the scowling Meyer brought the car to a halt. Meyer was Donka's chauffeur—a surly, rancorous German, an ex-engineer who suffered from a sense of outraged dignity. Oliver was trying to get himself out of the low car without bumping his head.

"Change of scene," observed Donka. "Meyer can come back here. I want to sit with you if you're going to drive."

Oliver dropped back against the cushions and gripped her arm. "I don't want you to sit with me," he said in a low voice. "Good God, don't you understand, Donka? I want to sit by myself. You drive me mad. You play some kind of damnable music on my nerves. What do you want? Do you want me to rape you here in the car?"

She smiled a slow, voluptuous smile straight into his eyes.

The huge boulevard lamps filled the car with a dim light that struck tiny sparks from Oliver's pupils. Meyer was listening in disgust to the whispers and the stillness behind him. He was tired. His wife had gallstones, and he had been up half the night massaging her back. He had spent the day hanging around parking places—he had spent the night waiting first outside the theatre, then outside the Ambassador, among Negroes and coloured riffraff of every shade—he, Dr. Meyer, engineer, who made a habit of keeping a couple of books in the car as a barricade against the pariahs who were now his colleagues.

"Go ahead, Meyer," said Donka. "Go on driving."

Air blowing damp from the ocean—the crests of trees—the jagged foliage of palms—street lamps mirrored in the asphalt—and the ceaseless, ceaseless chirping of crickets. It was about two in the morning. Cars driving in from the shore passed them in an endless chain.

"Drive left over the hill, Meyer," said Donka.

"No," protested Oliver. "It's farther that way—it takes longer."

"Are you impatient?" she whispered. He made no reply. Only later—when, alone in the night, they were driving uphill toward a silver-starred sky—only then and almost reluctantly did he answer: "Yes."

Donka loosed the fingers clasped round the soft, cool flesh of her arm and took his hand tenderly between her own.

"You're stupid, Puyu," she said some time later. "You don't understand. I'm happy. In all my life—do you hear, Oliver?—in all my life I've never been so happy as I am now—right now—this minute. It's the happiest moment of my life, Puyu—I want it to last longer—very long. Oh, that's a thing you couldn't understand, you stupid child."

Oliver, who had been lolling against her shoulder, drew himself erect.

"You were unkind to Ria," he said sternly.

"Not so beastly as she's been to me," Donka retorted. "Don't you interfere in women's affairs."

"Yes," thought Oliver boyishly. "Donka's unkind, but Ria's beastly. Donka's never low—never common." He felt his hand resting within her clasp as within a warm shell. "Little shell," he whispered inaudibly. It was a term of endearment born of the moments of their deepest passion. Her parted lips caressed his temple.

"I love you," he whispered, as though he were talking in

his sleep—so low that she had difficulty in understanding what he said. Perhaps he did not want her to understand.

"Yes, Oliver."

"I love you, Donka—I love you."

"Yes, Oliver, yes."

"Donka, don't you hear?—I love you—listen—I love you—I love you——"

"Yes, child—yes," said Donka. Her face was rapt with ecstasy. They had reached the summit now, and the massed slopes of the Sierras advanced through the clear night air to meet them.

"I want you to say it, too," whispered Oliver urgently.

Donka was silent. "I've said it too often," she thought in her heart. "I'm afraid."

"I love you, Donka——"

"I love you, Oliver," she said softly, with a sound in her throat that might have been a laugh or a sob—she did not herself know which. The car swung into a curve that led downhill. A cluster of stars spattered the sky and sank to the horizon.

"Oh——"

"What?"

"Stars—they're falling——"

"You must wish something," he said gravely.

"Yes," she rejoined with equal gravity. "But you must never tell what it was you wished." They were leaving the heights and descending between the tall, pale trunks of silver-lit eucalyptus trees. The song of the sea was audible here—sombre, uneven. "If only things would stay this way," thought Donka, and at the same moment, "they won't stay this way."

Meyer in front had caught an occasional word. He was furious that they should whisper of love in his presence without embarrassment. He jerked the car viciously round a curve and came out on the sea road, along which the last cars were making their way back to town. There was a smell of wood fire in the air—flames glimmered low outside the tents of campers—the beach was strewn with the tiny, yellow flares. Far out to sea lay the gambling ships, garlanded in light. Toward the north, where the waves sprayed white foam over the dark sand, the shore sloped more abruptly. Meyer flung his aggrieved shoulders forward as he threw in the clutch, and Oliver lifted Donka from the car. Lights were burning in the house.

"Shall I take Mr. Dent back to Beverly?" asked Meyer out of sheer spite, as Donka passed on silver-shod feet. He took it for granted that the question would embarrass her, but nothing ever embarrassed Donka.

"No, Meyer," she said. "Mr. Dent will spend the night here," and walked to the house without a backward glance for Oliver.

He stayed out under the sky for a minute or two, bareheaded, breathing deeply, as though he hoped thus to ease the tight band encircling his forehead. Then he crossed the little court between the garage and the house, where bathing-suits hung on a drier, and the air was filled with the odour of the damp wood of bath-houses and the burning wood of beach fires, with the odour of sea and night and summer. He hesitated at the veranda door, gazed up at the wooden columns, and turned his steps toward the sandy enclosure where, like sleepy dwarfs, little chairs and cushions crouched. The moon had set, and darkness lay over sea and sand, but high in the air a luminous haze quivered.

Meyer was still making an ostentatious clatter in the garage. Donka waited on the threshold till it had subsided. She was hungry for quiet. Her toes ached, the back of her neck ached, so tense had she been all evening. Now she relaxed. As she entered the little hall, a Chinese boy, incredibly slim-waisted, awoke.

"Yes, madame?" he murmured drowsily.

"Go to bed," she cried impatiently. "Quick! Off with you!" And the white coat slipped away. Next moment, however, Applequist presented himself, ceremonious, if sleepy. Donka thought highly of Applequist, who represented the respectable element in her household, which otherwise displayed faint leanings toward insanity. But she took his appearance at this hour with very bad grace.

"What's the matter?" she asked irritably.

The butler threw her a pained glance and helped her off with her cloak. "Is there anything Madame wishes?" he inquired with reserve.

"Only to be left alone," she replied succinctly.

"If Madame would like something to drink——" murmured Applequist.

"No," rejoined Donka, to the butler's amazement.

"Madame has given no orders for to-morrow," he persisted. "Is she to be called? Training? Massage? Riding? The car?"

"No!" she cried, her hands over her ears. "Nothing! Nothing! Will you leave me alone?"

"Sorry to have troubled Madame," said Applequist, offended, and retreated stiffly. Though he was the real thing, an authentic butler from the outset of his career, he behaved like a bad actor playing a butler's role. Eyeing his arched brows, Donka was seized by hatred and remorse. He switched a light or two off, switched a light or two on, and dissolved into thin air.

The roar of the sea could be heard beating through the silence, casting its huge waves up to the very wall of the house.

Donka, listening, slipped out of her silver shoes and bent a quizzical gaze on her outstretched toes with their dark red nails. Her feet were famous, peerless. Barefoot, smiling, she ran eagerly up the stairs to her bedroom.

A man rose from the couch as she entered. But it was not Oliver. It was Takus—Spartakus Lew, to give him his full name. This was too much for Donka, who promptly exploded.

"Have you all gone mad?" she cried, forgetting herself so far as to raise a clenched fist. "Did I order a reception committee? Perhaps you'll have the Santa Monica fire department out next time I get home at night?"

"There—there—Donka—child," murmured Takus feebly, mournfully. He was quite an old man, with old white flannel trousers and an old polo shirt covering his flabby body. His beach shoes were damp as though from long walking beside the sea, and his drenched grey hair lay tumbled about his forehead. It was a beautifully moulded forehead above sombre, grey, Jewish eyes and a nose that was much too large.

"Donka—I waited, darling." He spoke with a Russian accent. "I thought the child might need old Takus to-night. What? If not, so much the better. How was the film? How was our hero? Ravishing? What? Was he ravishing? As though he could have been anything else!"

Donka cast a furious glance round the room—the wet prints of Takus' huge flat feet were all over the mat-covered floor.

"Takus," she said, "you're such a trial. Don't you see what a trial you are?"

"All right, all right. I see it—keep cool—I see it all right. But it's a *première*, I thought. Ria Mara's playing, Ria Mara's the star, Donka will have to look on, I thought. Ria Mara will be celebrating her triumph—it's Ria Mara's evening, I thought—better wait for the child. Maybe she'll need

someone—maybe she'll want to talk Rumanian or drink or cry or forget—so I just waited."

"You're drunk, aren't you?" asked Donka and went to the mirror. Heedless of the man, she began to undress. He sent her an abject glance as her bare shoulders emerged from their green sheath, then turned his head away.

"Drunk, if you like—but my head's clear. If you want to play chess—it's wonderful to take the mind off things."

"Take the mind off—what? It was *her* evening, you think? You're an idiot. It was my evening—mine—my evening. I took the evening for myself. My evening, mine!" cried Donka. It was a low suppressed cry, accompanied by a little triumphal dance on naked, arched soles.

"Where's the prize?" asked Takus, pricking up his ears.

"May I ask you to disappear now?" she inquired disdainfully, as though just grown aware of the fact that she was practically unclothed. "Ghost!" she threw after him, when the door had closed on the rumpled, white-flannelled figure.

There were people who maintained that this Spartakus Lew had once been married to Donka, which was not the truth. She may have lived with him at one period of her life—she probably had—long ago in the dark beginnings when she was appearing in a burlesque show on the Bowery of lower New York. But the circumstance had completely slipped her mind—which was hardly strange, considering her prodigal habit of hurling herself into one love affair after another. Whether Takus ever thought of it was uncertain, nor did the question ever arise. She had come upon him again many years later in a deplorable condition, had supported him at first, then taken him to live under her roof. One person more or less loafing about the house did not much matter, and Takus was useful at times. But to stumble over him in her bedroom on a night when she had come home with Oliver was quite undesirable.

Clad in transparent pyjamas, she walked over to the couch and picked up the Russian book she found lying there. She could read Russian, as she could read all European languages. *Thoughts of a Revolutionist on the World Revolution*, the title ran. She pushed up the mosquito netting at the window and flung the thoughts of a revolutionist out. They landed with a dull thud on the shingled veranda roof. Most of the houses on the Santa Monica and Malibu beaches were reproductions of fishermen's cottages, with simple appointments and electri-

fied ship's lanterns, and all over Santa Monica and Malibu and the villas of Beverly Hills ghosts flitted—ghosts like Takus—fragments of the past, poverty-stricken friends, drunkards, morphine and cocaine addicts, celebrities of another day, worn-out, hopeless has-beens. . . .

Once she was alone, Donka felt her passion for Oliver sweeping her like a storm. She had known many varieties of men, many varieties of love. But this—this that she was feeling now—she had never known. This intoxication, this ecstasy, these heights were attained only once in a lifetime—if life were blessed——

A clock downstairs struck far too often, for the clocks in Donka's house were never right, and this one kept European time besides. Oliver was in the house. The walls vibrated with the rapture of that thought. Donka set out to look for him.

Oliver loathed being in the limelight when she was with him. Good, brave Puyu—and he had stuck to her as a soldier sticks to his flag—all evening long—it must have been torture for him. "Oliver," she called softly through all the rooms. It was late—the tide was going out—the ocean was beating more gently against the windows outside. She crossed the glass-enclosed veranda and stepped out under the columns—darkness, quiet. She stood listening—a little puff of wind tugged at her white sleeping pyjamas. She felt as though her eyes must be phosphorescent like a cat's. Then, from the pool, came the sound of a brief splash and suppressed laughter. She groped her way along the wall and turned a little switch that was wet with dew. The four spotlights at the corners of the pool flashed on—glaring segments of white radiance.

Oliver had chosen that moment to dive. He was swimming under water, just clear of the blue-green tiles at the bottom. He kept his arms close to his sides, moving only his hands and the tips of his feet—a long, golden figure, his hair lighter than his body. Canna lilies had been planted around the pool, and their tall stalks and fleshy heads, yellow and red, were mirrored in the water. There was something utterly artificial, unreal, in the sight of those luxuriant blossoms growing straight out of the sand of the beach—in the sight of that perfect, golden statue which was Oliver's body swimming almost motionlessly under water—vividly illuminated by the spotlights—spotlights even here.

Mute, enchanted, patient, Donka waited for him to come to the surface. Oliver held some kind of record for under-

water swimming—a record he had won in his Oxford days. She walked to the end of the spring-board. He was still down there. He swam about like a fish, glided along on his back, rose slowly, then, with his hands on the edge of the pool, drew himself out and reached Donka's side on the spring-board with a single bound, splashing her body with spray.

"Where are your clothes, silly child?" she asked, her eyes shining with happiness, naked and undisguised. He pointed behind him to where his garments lay strewn over the sand—his white waistcoat moving like a sleepy animal in the light breeze.

"Do you know that my coat's ruined?" he asked childishly. "They split it apart. They tore me to pieces when I left the theatre."

"You love that?" she smiled.

"I hate it," he returned indifferently.

Donka put out a finger, slipped it over his wet collar-bone, the curve of his shoulder, the bulge of his arm muscles. Then, while Oliver looked on interestedly, she sucked the drops from her finger-tip, letting the faint, salty flavour dissolve on her tongue. Dawn would soon be breaking. The breath of morning was in the air, and a thin, green line glimmered at the horizon.

"Doesn't taste good," she said with a mischievous smile, and suddenly she was in Oliver's arms. He was wet, cool, ardent, redolent of the sea. The spring-board quivered like something alive under their feet.

"Come into the water," he said. He was breathing deeply, heavily, as he released her. "It's glorious down there."

"Cold," she replied. She wanted to hold him, to draw him away with her, but he was already balancing on the board, shooting into the air, diving back into the water. The light was shattered against the broken green surface. Oliver's face reappeared promptly, his wet hair tumbled over his forehead.

"Come down," he called breathlessly. "Come along, come down."

She stood there a moment, irresolute, her bare toes scraping the rough coconut matting that covered the board. Suddenly she made up her mind, and tore off her pyjamas—wet through with Oliver's wetness. There was something rich, sweeping about her body—the wrists, knees, shoulders, were exquisitely dainty—the waist tapered—there was strength in the breasts, the hips, the thighs. Her skin was incredibly white in the light pouring from the four corners of the pool as she jumped.

Oliver had uttered an involuntary cry of delight. Gasping, she rose to the surface.

"It's cold. I want to go to bed," she demanded, breathless.

"In a moment," he promised. "It's so marvellous here."

"Donka wants to be carried to bed," she pleaded.

"Yes. You shall be carried to bed. But you've got to dive first."

"Never!" she cried, struggling for breath as she swam. "Dive? Never! The same old story. I can't dive. How do you dive, anyway?"

"Come along," he coaxed. It was a problem they had already wrestled with in Rhodes. "You're going to dive to-day—that's a brave girl. Just trust yourself to me. Just go limp and let yourself fall—straight down. I'll catch you. I'm here. You've got to keep your eyes open. Come ahead."

Donka, who had grown up in a slum on the outskirts of Bucharest, was desperately afraid of the water—desperately afraid of the demands made upon her by sport in any form. You rode, you swam—you did these things because they were expected of you—but doing them was a horror. Donka, who would have engaged a regiment single-handed—and she must have done equally brave things in her harried, down-trodden youth—who had challenged and vanquished Hollywood that night—Donka was a coward in the water.

"Just let yourself fall?" she inquired, terror clutching at her heart. "Just—oh, you Englishmen!"

"Oh, you gipsy—afraid of the water!" He probably did not know how arrogant his mouth was.

"*Allons!*" raged Donka. Her heart was pounding furiously. Let yourself fall, she thought. Down. Sink. Perhaps there were new sensations to be discovered in the depths of this mortal fear. She stopped moving. The water rushed loudly past her temples—she felt it closing over her. Then, her lips pressed convulsively together, she sank very slowly, down, down, through the midst of the humming roar. Suddenly she felt arms round her body, lips touching hers. She opened her eyes with difficulty. Oliver was holding her close, his face above hers—a face changed by the water's refraction of the light, but beautiful, serene, smiling, with lips shut tight. A strange mysterious face now—the face of her beloved. The rays of the floodlights penetrated to them even here—down at the bottom of the pool. Donka was swept by an overwhelming sense of release—her heart was beating strongly, easily. Then they were floating upward—in a close

embrace—growing lighter, lighter, lighter, till their eyes rose above the surface.

"Nice?" asked Oliver.

"Nice," she replied and began breathing again.

And when years later—long, long years later—Donka thought of Oliver, it was always that moment—when she had plunged downward and floated upward again in his embrace—it was always that moment she recalled as the highest peak of happiness she had ever reached.

Early in the morning Wang, the Chinese boy, found Oliver's clothes lying in the dew-wet sand. Gingerly he gathered up the items of Mr. Dent's apparel, and with a grin turned them over to Applequist. Betraying no sign of emotion, Applequist stalked into the pantry adjoining the kitchen—the domain of Ilonka, the Hungarian cook—a lean, singularly hysterical creature, and a past mistress of her art.

"Breakfast for two," he announced, in a tone that forbade any discussion.

Manuela, the Spanish maid, sitting with elbows propped on her outspread knees, both hands hugging her coffee-cup, greeted the news with a whistle. She was an excessively vulgar creature, taciturn but brimming with strength and sex, and a prime favourite of Donka's. Presently, thrusting a forefinger into the slippers she had removed, she pulled them on and went upstairs.

"The mail," whispered Applequist, handing her a Mexican basket full of letters.

"Are they up?" asked Manuela.

Applequist shrugged his shoulders. There was the barest trace of criticism in the gesture. He was replenishing the cigarette supply—English cigarettes—and opening windows. The room was instantly flooded with dazzling sunlight. Applequist blinked and went downstairs again.

Manuela, the basket in her hands, stood holding her breath, the better to take stock of the situation. The first guest room was quiet. Madame's bedroom was quiet, too, but it was a different kind of quietness—a quietness that stirred and breathed. Manuela could scent the difference. Intelligence she had none, but she was alive with instinct. She vanished into the bathroom, where disorder reigned. Unstoppered bottles, the scent of toilet water (she drew a deep breath)—wet towels on the floor—a special kind of masculine disorder. Manuela started tidying up.

Takus, his eyes watering, emerged from the second guest room, that lay beyond the bend in the narrow hall. Takus couldn't get used to the blinding California sunlight and suffered from chronic conjunctivitis.

"Is she awake?" The thrust of his head asked the question wordlessly.

"Go see for yourself," the maid replied impudently, for these two were predestined to hate each other. She found Donka's torn pyjamas in a corner, draped them over her arm, and sauntered into her room to sew. Takus rummaged among the letters for a moment, working the wide, sensitive lips of his mobile mouth like a monkey. He did not seem particularly pleased with the mail. "Everything's in a muddle again," he muttered. Which was a reflection on Donka's finances. Shuffling downstairs in his faded old beach shoes, he made his way to the very edge of the shore, where the waves were washing up their burden of weeds and sea-wrack. Huge pelicans crouched on the piles that were linked by a rope, intended to brace bathers against the heavy surf of the Pacific—a pelican—a pelican to each pile, and each pelican looking like Takus. Screaming seagulls swooped over them like trapeze artists at a circus.

"Everything's in a muddle," thought Takus. "There's a house and real estate and a ranch—and everything buried deep under mortgages, and not a chance of raising even the interest. Five servants, two expensive cars—and in debt to the vegetable dealer." The real emeralds had been sold, the paste emeralds had cost a good two thousand—and the two thousand had not been paid. No contract for two years now —not since the advent of the talkies had put an end to Morescu's usefulness. The teacher of voice culture in Paris with whom she had toiled desperately for three hours daily—breathing, stammering, forming syllables like a child—what had that cost her? And the rest cure in a mysterious Swiss sanatorium? And the trip to Rhodes? And men in general?

It was a curious thing about Donka, the prodigal. Everything she touched ran into money. Takus, staring at the pelicans out of those inflamed eyes of his that were comfortable only indoors, was casting up accounts. Marriage—a hundred thousand. Divorce—three hundred thousand. A great love—a million. Oliver Dent was a millionaire at twenty-six—he had never presented Donka with anything but the tiny elephants of which she was making a collection—she wouldn't have accepted anything else. There were elephants

from every quarter of the globe—very expensive, some of them. So now she had a glass case stocked with elephants—splendid!—and the ranch in Myrtle Valley was to be sold at auction next week.

Donka, on the other hand, had ruined herself for Oliver: parties in Paris, gipsy orchestras, Hindu dancers, a villa in Naples which was really a castle. Half a year's rent, that she might spend a week there with Oliver. A yacht to take them to Rhodes.

"I'm poor as Job," she had announced laughingly on her return. "But it was worth it."

Now and then she would be seized by a fit of economy more frenzied even than her extravagance. A wretched existence in Paris: from an hotel to an expensive *pension*, from the expensive *pension* to a cheap one, from the cheap one to a miserable hole in the wall. When Donka's budget did not balance, Takus was abused. The situation was hopeless at the moment.

The coast, crowned by sturdy palms, rose steep and yellow behind the house. A pelican flapped his wings heavily, but continued to squat on his perch. Takus shuffled resentfully back to the pantry.

Ilonka was brooding over the menu. "Madame has no character," she complained. "It's hard to cook for a lady who wants to be slim and has no character." Ilonka was keeping one eye on the Chinese. It was her duty to see that he ate a raw tomato daily. These Chinese undermined their constitutions, Donka had decided, with their everlasting diet of rice. She was subject to an occasional access of maternal solicitude for her personnel.

"Turkey again, then," groaned Ilonka. "You can eat whole buckets of turkey without getting fat." Ilonka's brow was heavy with resignation and discontent. Dreams of stuffed vine leaves baked in fat, of Szegedin goulash—pure goose drippings for the sauerkraut—perished unachieved in her brain. She had, moreover, cherished an unrequited passion for the former chauffeur, who had thrown up his job on that account. Meyer was a handsome man, too, and well educated, in Ilonka's opinion. But Meyer devoted his nights off to the care of his sick wife.

"Funny establishment, on the whole, isn't it, Applequist?" Takus inquired of the butler, who had just come in. Too dignified to reply, too polite not to, Applequist feigned deafness.

" Oioioi," sighed Takus, strolled to the ice-box, and took out a couple of bottles, preparatory to mixing himself a drink. The hall telephone rang.

Donka woke to full consciousness as the telephone rang below. For a long time she had been lying enveloped in a thin veil of dreams, drowsily aware of her own limbs and clearly conscious that Oliver was breathing beside her. She opened her eyes—yes, he was there, he was breathing. The rose-grey curtains were drawn, staining the light that filtered through them. The room was filled with the breath of the ocean, and you could hear the surf, pounding heavily but not so heavily as it had pounded during the night. Donka sat up, cautiously, so as not to waken Oliver, and looked at herself in the mirror that covered half the wall nearest her bed. " Good," she thought. She hadn't had enough sleep, but her limbs were charged with that languorous vigour that follows upon a blissful night.

" You belong to me," she thought. " Oliver Dent belongs to me." She thought of him by his full name—Oliver Dent —as it appeared in the advertisements and on the electrical display signs. His name was really Edward Drake, a descendant of the great Drake who had fought against the Spanish Armada under Elizabeth. Other film actors had to change their names because they were too commonplace. His name was too good for the films.

She, Donka Morescu, had changed nothing. She had been Donka Morescu all her life. She denied neither herself nor her name, neither her age nor her Rumanian accent, nor the first faint lines beginning to show in her face; neither her sorry reputation nor her wild past, nor any piece of insanity she had perpetrated or hoped to perpetrate.

She was poring over Oliver's sleeping face again. His lashes were as pale as his hair, but so long and thick that they seemed darker, casting shadows under the closed eyes. Donka stooped warily. Yes, there were shadows under the eyes. She was oddly astonished and dismayed to discover two fine lines at either side of the pouting, exquisitely curved mouth. She brooded over them. " That's because something—or somebody—hurt you once," she thought. " No one else knows you this way," she thought, swept anew by that sense of triumphant ecstasy that pierced their relationship again and again. " Only me. Only to me do you belong like this."

The whole world was familiar with the face of Oliver Dent. There was not a town from the North Pole to the South where

it hadn't been displayed. People knew it in all its aspects —laughing, dreamy, amorous, posed in a kiss, in pain, in weariness—in every guise that photographers and directors could wring from it. He had counterfeited sleep for the cameras, too, but no one save Donka had ever seen him asleep —really asleep. He had told her so himself. He had confessed to her in one of his rare sentimental and communicative moments that he had never been able to bring himself to fall asleep with a woman. "My mother's the only woman who ever saw me asleep," he said. "And Mother died when I was six." The knowledge had appeased Donka's savage jealousy of all his former loves. He had his reserves, this Oliver—a muteness, a withdrawal at times—an atmosphere almost mournful on occasion, like the mournfulness one associates with very beautiful animals. Donka's fancy conjured up the vision of an Oliver passing from one niggardly, unconsummated love affair to another—silent embraces devoid of mutual joy, from which he had risen to retreat within himself and flee. Donka, the experienced, knew what to do. She knew that no loneliness existed deeper than the loneliness of love. She fought for Oliver and won. She was the only woman who knew him asleep.

The telephone rang again. The stairs creaked under the descent of Takus' huge, nerve-racking beach shoes. Donka picked up the receiver and listened in. It was the *Examiner* this time, and before she had replaced the receiver Pulsky, the man who handled her personal publicity and that of many other stars, was on the phone. Takus could take care of him, she decided, and hung up. But Oliver was awake now.

She watched expectantly as he opened his eyes and inspected, first the ceiling, then the pillow crumpled within his arm, before he realised where he was. "If there's one thing in the world I loathe," he began, "it's gin." Donka burst into laughter. She remembered that he had been a little drunk in the car the night before, and had been rummaging in the pantry after their nocturnal swim, mixing himself cocktails.

"The day after!" she mocked.

He felt his ribs, that arched as he breathed, then placed his fingers on his stomach, just below the lovely hollow under the breastbone.

"It's that damned sensation that nothing but whisky helps," he declared.

Donka reached for the house phone. "Whisky," she said. "Water. Ice."

Oliver listened attentively. There was a taste in his mouth that he did not like. It was Manuela, dispatched by the tactful Applequist, who brought the whisky. Donka got up and took it from her at the door, while Oliver watched. The clink of the ice cubes in the tall glasses made him feel a little better. Donka sat down on the edge of the bed as though he were an invalid, and he toyed with her nightgown, tinted the same ivory tone as her skin.

"You're so beautiful," he said, "and so healthy." It sounded like a reproach and sent Donka off into another peal of laughter.

"Poor, weak, sick little Puyu," she said kissing him.

He submitted for a moment, then pushed her away. "We're tired," he complained. "All of us—mouth and eyes and hands—all tired." He sounded like a spoilt child.

Donka shook him. "You're still asleep, Oliver," she told him severely. He had emptied his glass, and now he was holding it out again, watching it fill first with the golden-hued whisky, then with the little ice bubbles of mineral water.

"There," he said, having drained it, "that's better. Ghastly—this business of waking up."

Donka was moving about the room, humming. She had found a brush somewhere and was playing with her hair before the mirrored wall. Oliver, watching her, decided that she had the face and body of a young peasant.

"I dreamed of Bucharest last night," he said suddenly.

Donka turned quickly. "You——" she asked in wonder. "How do you come to dream of Bucharest?"

"Why shouldn't I dream of Bucharest?" he inquired perversely. "I was there once, too. As a child——"

"You?" Donka repeated. "In Bucharest?" as though this were a piece of presumption on Oliver's part.

"Yes. I remember it very clearly now. My father had been transferred from Constantinople to Warsaw, and we spent the night at Bucharest." (Oliver's father had been a diplomat, and Oliver's childhood memories played—spasmodically, disjointedly, like the action of a film—over all sorts of places, marshalled all manner of people in review, till they finally settled and came to rest at Magdalen College, Oxford.) "There was a street, with lamps that looked to me like silver, and we drove in a carriage—my father and another man and I. Every now and then the other man would prod the coachman with the tip of his boot—then we'd turn left or right. I remember that distinctly. And the coachman was horribly

fat—I dreamed of him again last night—he was so outrageously fat that he frightened me. I don't believe I saw a thing in Bucharest but that coachman's fat back."

The thought of the fat coachman made him feel that he needed more whisky. He put out his hand for the bottle.

"We went to a coffee-house," he continued. "I remember the smell—coffee and cigarettes—both unusually strong—and such slim, handsome officers at the tables—I wanted to grow up like them."

Donka waited for more, but the recital was ended. She walked over to the bed. Oliver had closed his eyes.

"How old were you then?" she demanded.

"Over six," he replied. "My mother was dead."

"So you saw the officers in the coffee-house," she observed. "That was the Capsa in the Calea Victoria. Do you by any chance remember the girl there who went round selling cigarettes? A kind of little thing, skinny and ragged. Some of the officers were rude to her—she slept with a good many of them. She was fifteen. Do you remember?"

Oliver opened his eyes.

"I was the girl," she said. He remained silent. "Oh, yes, I was the girl," she repeated, on the almost singing note she sometimes used. "That was when I ran away from home and lived with two prostitutes. They took me in out of sheer good-heartedness, you understand. There was a kind of partition—I could hear through the curtain when they brought gentlemen in from the street. Never will I forget the smell of that place—acetic acid—very strong. They use it to kill bed-bugs—did you know that?"

"Donka!" cried Oliver, as though this were some trance from which she must be roused. But she was still back there in Bucharest.

"Well, what?—Donka!" she asked, her eyes far away. "We had bed-bugs—naturally. The wall beside my so-called bed was all speckled by them. And the smell——"

"Why are you hurting us both?" demanded Oliver, shaking her shoulder.

"Because I—everything's so smooth—we're so thick with paint. I don't want to be like that. I want to be as I am. I want you to love me as I am. Ten years older than you—and wrinkles—I could have made myself up before you woke. But, no," she cried passionately, "I want you to love me with all my wrinkles and faults." She went to the window and pushed back the curtains, confronting the sun as she

might have confronted a spotlight. Oliver sat up in bed. He noted the bold lines of her face, the heavy brows, the contours of her body.

"Oh, yes," he said softly. "Oh, yes. Oh, yes." There were moments when he comprehended his incomprehensible love for her. Everything surrounding him was pretty and sweet. This alone was bitter.

The phone in the hall below rang again. Donka paid no heed to it. She approached the bed. "Get up, lazy-bones," she commanded. "You're growing old and ugly here. Into the ocean with you! Then you shall have your breakfast on the porch—and not another drop of whisky." Her eyes were sparkling with delight. Just as Oliver was putting out a hand to draw her toward him, Takus scratched like a dog at the door.

"What's the matter?" cried Donka in a fury.

"You're wanted on the phone," Takus answered hoarsely from outside. "It's important."

"Ph—important! What's it all about?" asked Donka.

"Nothing," came the whispered reply. "Bill Turner wants to speak to you."

Donka sat motionless for a moment. She withdrew her hand from Oliver's. Then: "I see," she said. "Bill—very well. I'll speak myself."

She sat beside Oliver for another moment before moving to the telephone. But she was no longer with Oliver.

"So," she said. "Bill Turner wants to speak to me. Do you know what that means?"

"He was in great spirits yesterday. He probably wants to sleep with you. Or offer you a contract. Maybe both," Oliver speculated indolently.

Donka's eyes were changed as she picked up the telephone. Her neck was changed; she held her head high and straight.

"A contract," she said disdainfully. "It's two years since they offered me a contract. They'll have to pay this time."

"A lemon," in Hollywood parlance, is a film script that refuses to come right—a wretched, sapless affair that has been squeezed dry, passed from office to office, from hand to hand, from brain to brain of the Scenario Department, submitted again and again to the responsible powers sitting in judgment in the so-called Front Office, condemned again and again by the said powers as a lousy, impossible piece of tripe. A "lemon" is a story that has been revised and

rejected, revised and rejected, revised and rejected, till not a word, not a thought of the original material remains.

The Night of Destiny was a " lemon " of this kind—for over six months.

The Night of Destiny started its career as the novel—successful without being particularly good—of Fyodor Syolguboff, a young Russian *émigré* in New York. It had appeared serially in a magazine, where an agent saw it. The agent, a Czecho-American named Nedruhal, brought the story to the attention of Ralph Chestley, the dramatist. Chestley concocted a play from it, which he sold to Velkers, the theatrical producer. Velkers had the play adapted by his literary factotum, Hooper Benson, and produced it. The play was a failure, but meantime the novel had developed into a success. Nedruhal went forth to persuade Bill Turner, head of the Phœnix Picture Corporation, to buy up the film rights —which he did. Bill Turner raved about the material for three and a half days. He held conferences with Sam Houston and Erbacher, head of the Scenario or Writers' Department, after which the script was dispatched to that department for treatment.

A writers' department is a building of narrow corridors and innumerable doors. Each door opens on a small room holding a desk, a swivel chair, a typewriter, and a ventilator. A girl sits at the typewriter, waiting for the writer to get an idea. The writer sits on the swivel chair, his feet on the desk, waiting for himself to get an idea. The ventilator hums an accompaniment.

There are solitary writers who never leave their offices, who never make the acquaintance of their fellow writers next door. There are sociable writers who get together with other sociable writers and spend the eight hours of their working day playing poker. There are hopelessly lackadaisical writers who never work their way beyond a hundred and fifty a week. There are fiercely ambitious writers who never work their way beyond a hundred and fifty a week either. There are cynical writers who bend all their energies to the task of turning out a minimum of work for a maximum of money. And there are conscientious writers who wrestle like any artist in the world with their material, driven to the point of suicidal despair when they do not succeed.

As for the script itself, it must pass through as many rigorously tended and supervised phases as a silkworm before it produces acceptable thread.

It first goes through the process of retransformation from its original state to an outline, being reduced to the handy, twenty-page form of a so-called synopsis, so that all concerned may, without loss of time, extract its essence in plain, unvarnished language. From the synopsis a story is evolved, which is no longer the original story, but includes changes dictated by such considerations as the taste of the Front Office, the possibility of censorship, the stars at one's disposal and the desire to please a public of fifty millions. Even during these early stages clouds gather, tensions develop, and the first gleams of lightning flash.

The writer has two objectives : he wants to turn out a very good film, and he wants to make money. These two need not be mutually exclusive—though they sometimes are. It is that very thing—the utterly fortuitous and incalculable element in success—the fact that sometimes good films catch on and poor ones do not, that sometimes poor films catch on and good ones do not, that expensive films starring expensive favourites sometimes fail to make money, while cheap films presenting unknown beginners create a sensation—the fact that this sometimes happens but that the contrary is as frequently true, that nothing—absolutely nothing—is predictable, and it is not until three months after the *première* that an approximate idea of the film's success can be formed —these are the things that envelop the birth of the script in a light haze of hysteria which mounts, as production progresses, to a state of frenzy and wholesale psychoses.

Returning to the synopsis : it is next hacked into small scenes, in which form it is known as a ' treatment.' The treatment is taken in hand by experts, who adapt it to the camera angle. It emerges as ' continuity.' The continuity is turned over to the director, who rages and fumes, throws the whole thing away, and fashions it anew. This new creation is the scenario—the thing from which the picture is finally produced.

So much for the intricate yet normal process of development of a film script. When it comes to a " lemon," however —to material born, like *The Night of Destiny*, under an evil star—such a script has a weary and devious road to traverse, and returns again and again like a boomerang to the desks of those who handled it.

The Night of Destiny had been roaming about the Scenario Department in this fashion for more than six months, tacking and veering through Rooms 768, 734, 798, 742, 858, 872, 834

and 751. James W. Simons had started it, and Marion Nesmith, Parker Reeves, Harry Prevens, Mabel Calhoun, Walter Robinson, Harryman S. Lewis, and Pyotr Kvastschenko had gnashed their teeth over it. There had been a time during that period—in the fourth month of its existence, perhaps—when the script had been pronounced almost acceptable. But that was the time when the P.P.C. was having trouble with William Williams, the star who was to have played the leading role of the Russian revolutionist. Williams had slipped through their fingers, simply allowed himself to be bagged by the Pacific Company, which was hardly a sporting thing to do. And from that moment *The Night of Destiny* had gone from bad to worse, till at last it was permitted to fall quietly asleep. True, some beginner—a sixty-dollar man, a Russian who had not yet mastered English, who did not even have a secretary—was puzzling over it somewhere. But that did not really count and was just to keep the man busy, since he was being paid in any case. He could sometimes be seen—melancholy, pensive, biting his nails—creeping along the numbered asphalt streets of the studio—keeping to the sunny side even in the scorching heat—since he was a little tubercular—and starting in alarm when anyone addressed him.

"Hello, Pete. Anything new?" They called him Pete, since his Russian name was unpronounceable.

"Thank you, yes. I'm working on some material—splendid stuff—about our revolution—the Russian revolution, you know."

"Oh—*Night of Destiny*. That old lemon! Well, lots of luck, Pete."

So much for film scripts in general, and *The Night of Destiny* in particular.

On the morning following the *Cardogan première*, Bill Turner reached the studio an hour earlier than was his wont. The doorman, having admitted his car, rushed to the phone to signal to the Front Office the tidings of Bill's approach. But Ruth and Mabel, the two secretaries, being prepared for such incursions, were at their posts and beamed the sunniest of morning greetings to their entering chief. Bill was by nature despondent, but he valued optimism in others, and delighted in his daily encounter with the one-armed man who stood guard at the corner of Studio Street No. 4, leading to the stages, and who always crowed with the same imperturbable smile: "Isn't it a wonderful day?"

"It is, indeed," Bill would reply, and, somewhat cheered, would clamber up the staircase to his office. A cumbersome, uncouth staircase it was, more like a kind of iron fire-escape ladder, improvised rather than built, to run up the wall of the two-storey building.

Bill cast an abstracted eye, without being in the least abstracted, over the mail in the small, square wire baskets, signed a few letters, issued a few quiet orders to the dictaphone on his desk, and stepped to the open window. Street No. 1 lay below—a little grass—a few mimosa shrubs—and the carpentry shop beyond, whence issued the sound of the electric saw in action. It made a hellish racket, but Bill loved it. He loved the smell of sawdust, of fresh wood, of the singing saw, wailing in chromatic intervals up the scale —it helped him think. Bill was a small man of uncertain age, with the good complexion and supple shoulders of the golf player. He had a vein of cynical humour and a kindly heart. He had his secrets—who hasn't? He loved Van Gogh, Stendhal, and a red-headed girl in San Francisco, to whom he wasn't married. His office had recently been fitted out with metal furniture—in that modern style which appalled the sybaritic dwellers of Hollywood. But he had kept the two huge, antique candlesticks of silver, with their gigantic wax candles and the necklets formed by two hundred years of wax drippings. When Bill had a weighty problem to tackle, he would move his fingers caressingly over those old stalactiform patterns that smelled faintly of wax; the movement released something in his mind and made it flexible.

He stroked the wax for about three minutes that morning. Then he summoned to his presence Messrs. Houston, Hopkins, and Erbacher. They arrived promptly, though they made a show of sauntering in, saluted him with that noisy incivility to which Bill had trained them, helped themselves to cigarettes, and seated themselves in the metal chairs, leaving an open space in the centre of the room for Bill, who found it necessary to pace back and forth during conferences.

Houston and Hopkins were persons of consequence and influence in the P.P.C. organisation—battle-scarred veterans: Houston, large, ponderous, and animated, Stewart E., as Hopkins was affectionately called, dapper, courteous, soft-spoken, diplomatic. Erbacher was younger and less important, and, though he was a good man, he suffered from a chronically uneasy conscience. That was because he had much to conceal. He had taken his Ph.D. at a German university.

He read Greek freely, Plato was his favourite author, and he himself had written two very literary plays which had been produced in Europe. He was, in a word, exposed to the constant danger of being considered highbrow, which, in Hollywood, has sinister implications. It implies an admixture of culture, of pride in one's culture, and of incompetence in practical affairs; it implies intellectual snobbishness combined with a lack of business ability. Though Erbacher had discarded his doctor's title, hidden Plato, denied his authorship, and brilliantly reorganised the Writers' Department, something about the lines of his forehead remained suspect. He sat on the edge of his chair, and his upper lip would break out from time to time in delicate beads of moisture, like a window in an over-heated room.

"Boys," said Bill, pacing the room furiously, "boys, there are a couple of details that need readjusting. The next thing on our programme is *Milestones*. We're supposed to begin shooting on—wait a second—on June 10th. That'll have to be postponed. Just a moment, Sam. There's this Ria Mara mess."

Stewart E. assumed an expression which said: Is there a mess?

"Yes," replied Bill, without waiting for the question. "Ria Mara's making trouble—which is hardly surprising, considering how we all cut her last night. Oh, yes, we cut her all right. I cut her—and I know what I'm doing. I think she was lousy in *Cardogan*—absolutely lousy and affected, and the public's had enough of her. We have an option on her at five thousand a week. Well, I don't propose to pay any such sum for that worn-out phonograph disc. She called me up at home this morning——"

"She did?" cried Sam, shocked to the core. Bill's private life was considered the holy of holies, whose peace must never be disturbed.

"She did. Bellyached about her nerves, and she didn't know if she was in any condition to work with Oliver. I calmed her down—told her to rest, spare herself. Who the devil wants her to play with Oliver? She's thirty-five. See her alone and she'll pass for twenty-seven. Put her next to Oliver and she looks like sixty-two. We'll put Peggy into *Milestones*."

"That baby?"

"Exactly. She's got a future. When they're young, they don't know their business. By the time they've learned their

business, they're old. She needs a little grooming—a little preliminary work—a little publicity. I think I can do something with her in four weeks. We'll shorten the part—cut it down a bit—and throw all the limelight on Oliver. Oliver's the card we've got to gamble on. Oliver—in the limelight. Did you say something, Sam?"

"Do you think it's safe to let Oliver go wandering around for another four weeks? He ought to be put into something as soon as possible. He's been vacationing too long. Vacations don't agree with him."

"Don't agree with him! You go gallivanting off to an island with Morescu and see how it agrees with you."

"I don't mean Donka. I mean we ought to see that Oliver drinks less."

"Sh!" Bill glanced around, as though the publicity hounds might have penetrated even here—into the sacred seclusion of a conference. "Oliver never touches a drop. If his hands shake a little now and then, it's because he trains too hard. Everyone knows that."

"I had a strange talk with Oliver Dent," Erbacher interposed. "He's too naïve to be able to express himself. But under that radiant surface there's something tired in him—a kind of infinitesimal crack in his spirit. If he drinks, he does it to wind himself up. He's young, and he's had too much of everything—too much success, too much love, too much pleasure. He's surfeited—surfeited to the point where it's almost a disease." Erbacher fell silent, tiny beads of sweat on his upper lip. There was a moment's embarrassed pause, as though something flagrantly indecent had been said. Erbacher, conscious that he would remain forever an alien here, drew out a handkerchief—smelling, to make matters worse, of some unfamiliar, unmasculine perfume—and wiped his upper lip.

"Well, then, boys," Bill continued, disregarding Erbacher's irrelevant remarks, "our first job is to get out something sensational in the next four weeks. We've reached a peak with *Cardogan*, and we've got to keep the business at the top. What we can do——"

"Sensations, unfortunately, don't grow on the open palm," remarked Stewart E., eyeing his own outspread palm as if he actually expected to see something sprout from it.

"I guess Bill's got his sensation ready to spring," murmured Sam. "But have you a story for Donka?"

Bill cast him a swift glance, a little piqued that his old

comrade in arms should have shot the target from under his very nose.

"I've been counting on your help in that matter," he said, and moved over to his wax candles. "I asked Donka to be here at two. I'd like to have a couple of tests made," he added, and began playing with the wax. He had his troubles—graver than those he was telling.

At this point the conference crystallised into that attitude which is typical of conferences. The three men propped their foreheads on their hands, scribbled on scraps of paper, played with their belt buckles. One would emit an occasional grunt, murmur a few disjointed words, only to retract his suggestion before it was made. Bill stood patiently at the window, listening to the saw.

"Do any of you remember that Russian stuff?" he asked at length. "*Night of Destiny.*"

Erbacher, the dream-ridden, had every detail of the department he ran at his finger-tips. He gave them a brief outline of the script, reported that "some Russian or other" was working on it—he could even pronounce the wretch's name: Kvastschenko, he was called—and suggested that the synopsis be sent for.

"I have the synopsis here," Bill remarked casually. "I was ploughing through it last night. If we put a competent man to work on it—say—let's say, James Simons—we ought to have a decent script in—let's say, three days. It seems to me the right kind of thing—Russian background—Donka can sport her accent and sing bass to her heart's content."

Erbacher had risen and taken the yellow, typewritten pages proffered by his chief. Dismally dry and legal in appearance, each page wide-margined according to regulations and stamped with the sequence number, the script looked more like an official document than a piece of creative labour.

"I'll see if Simons is in the building," he said apprehensively. James Simons was the most talented and the laziest ant in the swarming hive of the Writers' Department.

"Wasn't that the junk we bought for William Williams last year?" asked Sam Houston. "Far as I remember, there wasn't a decent woman's part in it." Painfully he concentrated his thoughts on a point months back. There was something spectral about this resurrection of stories and projects dead and gone.

"Simons will have to write in a woman's part—a Morescu part. I think it's magnificent material."

" I think it's the rankest piffle. But if you're set on having Donka, that's what he'll have to do. Donka in sables, Donka with a head-kerchief and boots, Donka in a castle, Donka on the barricades—isn't that about the way it went, Erbacher? "

" It's high time you found out. You're to supervise the production—and it's going to be a super-production." Bill promised grimly. Erbacher, who knew by heart all the scripts roving about his department, suddenly broke into a recital of the story. He knew the distaste with which the board members regarded the idea of reading a manuscript.

" The story runs this way," he began. " Tatiana is the young wife of the cruel and brutal Prince Gregoryevitch, head of the secret police in Petrograd! " (" How young? " murmured Stewart E. in the background.) " The prince is called to Petrograd, where the first rumblings of the revolution have broken out, and Tatiana is left behind at a little summer palace not far from town. The Neva, birch trees, terraces, and so forth. That night a man takes refuge in her room—a fleeing revolutionist escaped from prison. When the police come in search of him, she's moved by a sudden gust of sympathy to hide him in her bathroom. She detains the police for a moment or two, while the young man—Akim, he's called, if I remember correctly—shaves off his beard and puts on a coat belonging to the prince. He tricks the police brazenly by pretending to be the prince, in which Tatiana abets him. The police leave the house, and the two young people, left to themselves, are swept by a flood of wild passion which ushers in a night of love." (" Like hell it does," muttered Sam Houston at this point. " It ushers in a row with the censorship.") " In the morning Akim resumes his flight, leaving Tatiana a ring engraved with a secret symbol which will protect her when the revolution breaks out. Life goes on—the society of Petrograd dances on Vesuvius. Revolution—the Reds burst in, in the midst of a sumptuous feast. The prince and his wife are arrested and condemned to death. Well, and then——" said Erbacher, suddenly impatient and seized by a strange loathing of his highly coloured tale, " after that, you can finish it as you like. Akim finds her in prison, or she goes to him and he saves her, or he flees with her, or prevents her execution at the last moment—it can end happily, with both of them getting safely across the border, or unhappily, with both of them being shot—or she alone can be shot—or he alone can can be shot—or she can have a child by

Akim—great scene for Morescu—these endings I've mentioned have all been worked out."

He broke off, pulled out the perfumed handkerchief, and wiped his upper lip. He felt bitterly mortified whenever he was called upon to tell the story of a film—wherein his job consisted.

"I think it's damned good stuff," Stewart E. observed at length. Bill informed the round disc of his house telephone that he wished to see Mr. Simons.

"Mr. Simons is not in the building," the telephone replied after a minute's interval. Erbacher sighed. Bill looked at his wrist-watch.

"I'll need a good scene from the film in twenty minutes," he stated, "when Donka's due. I've got to keep her steamed up and get a couple of test shots right away."

Erbacher drew his fountain-pen from his vest pocket and proceeded without more ado to sketch some dialogue on the back of the yellow sheets. He blinked at his work, for his eyes were weak, and he avoided glasses lest they should give him an intellectual look.

"What's the name of the fellow who's messing around with the manuscript?" Bill asked impatiently.

"Kvastschenko. A beginner. His script's in Russian," murmured the distressed Erbacher.

"That's fine," said Bill Turner, the mighty. "Have him come over with his script. I know Russian—better than English."

This marked the end of James Simons' career. It marked the beginning of Pyotr Kvastschenko's career. It was also the opening gun in the production of that super-film, *The Night of Destiny*, with Donka Morescu in the leading role.

Toward the middle of June something broke over Hollywood which the papers called the worst heat-wave in thirty years—a statement difficult to check in a place that was not yet thirty years old. The sky, already faded and bleached by an excess of sunlight, vanished altogether to give way to a milky, turbid nothingness that flooded the endless rows of streets with arid heat. A small silver airship, advertising something or other, floated over the far-flung city like a tired fish in an unclean, over-heated aquarium. The asphalt of the pavements softened and played *fata Morgana*, cheating motorists again and again with delusions of moisture—pools

of water and little lakes—which on approach dissolved into hot, quivering air. Grapes and figs ripened, but the flowers withered away, even to the hardy tangles of red geranium covering all the slopes, and the tall, wild sunflowers that intensified the scorched, brown colour of the dry hills.

And while sunstrokes multiplied in the streets, work went on in the studios, with thirty-five spots illuminating and thoroughly heating each set.

Milestones had been postponed. *The Night of Destiny* was in process of production. On the P.P.C. grounds Nôtre Dame was being torn down and Petrograd erected. Forced night and day shifts were constructing the banks of the Neva, the Schlüsselburg, the Winter Palace, between a disreputable Marseilles street and the jungles of the last Borneo film. On the small test-stage Eisenlohr, patient and fanatical as a fakir, was toiling with his actors over the preliminary groundwork, polishing, kneading, before the cameras could be faced. The place reeked of glue, dust, and sweat. The murderous heat rolled in like molten metal from an alien planet. Eisenlohr removed his coat, his shirt, his silk undershirt. His huge torso naked, he played the important scenes for them. Donka sat in a corner, intent on what he was showing her, what he was trying to get from her. She was all a-quiver, like a cat stalking its prey. This was her first talkie role. Her whole future was at stake.

This *Night of Destiny* would determine whether she was to scale new heights—whether activity, wealth, success, lay in store for her—or whether she would be forced to retire, finally and inexorably, into the limbo of uselessness. She would have to struggle hard—terribly hard. Her voice, her speech, her acting—they were all too loud, too strenuous, too emotional. Old silent stuff. She belonged to the dramatic school of sweeping gestures, outbursts of passion. She had been taught to represent hatred plainly, love plainly, despair plainly, everything plainly. Now—and this was what she would have to learn all over again—everything depended on suggestion. The glance, the human glance—a broken sound—a hand, merely a finger, lifted—that was all this new medium of the talkies would tolerate. Eisenlohr, his shoulder-blade adorned by two jagged scars—relic of a grenade splinter—was a veritable demon. He arrived at the studio in the morning, shaved, bathed, civilised, like anyone else. By night he was blue-bearded, filthy from head to foot, a tousle-headed devil who, without rhyme or reason, persisted in work-

ing fourteen hours on end—which was a breach of contract. Morescu worked fourteen hours with him. She was a docile soul in the creative torments of purgatory.

Meantime Oliver was on vacation, and having a singularly disagreeable time of it. He spoke to his secretary again once or twice of the desirability of getting away somewhere for the trout fishing, but he could not muster up sufficient energy for the trip. For three days, moreover, he was sick—or something of the kind—taking to his bed and refusing to speak to anyone. The huge Spanish house in Beverly Hills fell silent with him. The Italian cook on the ground floor stopped singing arias—he, too, had started out with talkie aspirations and wound up in the kitchen. Dan, the coloured man, wandered about with mournful white eyes, conning comforting passages from his well-thumbed little Bible. The five dogs in the kennels were forbidden to bark. Eve the car was coasted down the drive, to avoid disturbing the hush.

Jerry, the secretary, sat in his room, gazed down on the hundreds of thousands of huge evening lights suspended over Hollywood, and dissolved into sudden tears. Jerry was soft and effeminate, with a girlish face and a little bracelet encircling his thin wrist—the last person in the world fit to be a star's secretary. His single qualification for the job consisted in the fact that he had been at Magdalen—like Oliver Dent, when Oliver Dent had still been Edward Drake. You could talk Oxford slang to him. That was all. Apart from that, he loved Oliver—had loved him furtively, shamefully, abnormally, from boyhood. Everyone was in love with Oliver. Even in his own household he was surrounded by this sticky importunity that ruined his temper—this curse of being loved without being able to love in return. It drove him frantic.

No sooner had the first reporters got wind of his illusive illness—as they did in about thirty-six hours—than Oliver was up and about. He and Bill Turner held a brief, monosyllabic parley, man to man.

"What's wrong with you?"

"Nothing. Really nothing at all. Just a kind of feeling as though my head were stuffed with cotton instead of anything sensible." There he stood, bronzed, clear-eyed, erect, handsome—the ideal on which all young men strove to pattern themselves.

Bill recommended a dose of self-discipline. He intimated that a brief holiday from alcohol sometimes worked wonders.

He agreed that it would be very wise to get away for the trout fishing somewhere. "Good-bye, old boy."

Oliver climbed, muttering, into his car and drove away—drove haphazard and at breakneck speed on and on through Hollywood, on and on through Los Angeles, on and on along horrible, clogged-up streets, through the Chinese quarter, through the Negro quarter, past the stadium, through suburbs, through oil-fields, through the boiling, quivering heat of the asphalt roads that led nowhere.

He needed Donka. They had taken Donka from him—the gipsy, the peasant girl who loved him and treated him abominably. The scenes she had made, the kisses she had given him. Her laughter. Her breath. The bitter allure of her ignoble past. Her shoulders, where you could fall asleep as tranquilly as on your mother's. A strange woman had appeared in her place for a brief hour one evening—a weary woman, her eyes straying absently, her hands moving nervously, two deep lines of suffering etched about her mouth—a woman who complained bitterly of Eisenlohr and the difficulties of the sound *th*. But that wasn't Donka. That was Morescu or Tatiana from *The Night of Destiny*, if it was anything more than the presentment of a shadow on the screen.

For the rest, Oliver adhered pretty strictly to his programme of self-discipline. He gave up whisky, and drank amazing quantities of fruit juice, which seemed to him too sweet to quench a man's thirst, though he drank it forever. Still, the cottony feeling in his head persisted, only now it seemed to be associated with that vague sense of pressure at his stomach, which wasn't a pain but was more disagreeable than pain. Besides, his complete abstention from alcohol led to insomnia. He took veronal—not much. But, curiously enough, he didn't react to veronal. He lay awake and listened to the cars humming down Sunset Boulevard. He turned on the light and scrawled figures of little men—four lines, two circles—till he grew drowsy. Hardly had he turned out the light when he was wide awake again. In the darkness he telephoned to Donka. She had not come home yet. Takus' voice, which Oliver hated like poison, supplied the information. Oliver lay there, fighting his man's fight against the idea of giving in and mixing himself some whisky—a great deal of soda and a very little whisky. Self-discipline. He refrained. The cars on Sunset Boulevard. A tiny green light rose behind his lids and went out, rose and went out.

An hour may have gone by. In other countries the birds sang just before dawn. Here in Hollywood there were no birds except in winter. Nothing but crickets out there : loud, shrill, never-ending.

" It isn't love at all," he thought mutinously, " this business with Donka. It's just nervousness." He phoned again. It was a little after three. This time Donka answered.

" Puyu ! Aren't you asleep yet? What's wrong? "

" Nothing. I just wanted to say good night. Sorry. Rather mad, what? "

" Not at all. Very sweet. Good night, child."

" Sleep well, Donka."

" Thank you. You too."

" Are you very tired? Anything new? "

" Pretty tired. Eisenlohr's riding me to death. And Williams is no leading man for me. A puppet in a show window."

" Did they finally get Williams after all? "

" Yes. Cheap. He stood whining at the gates of Bill's palace till they took him back. God, what a loathsome beast he is ! He's furious because his part's been cut."

" Understandable," said Oliver politely. He waited a few seconds. Then : " Donka," he said tentatively.

" Yes, Puyu? "

" Nothing. You know I can't tell you I love you except when I'm drunk. I miss you, Donka."

" Yes, Puyu," she said softly. She lay in her bed and pressed the receiver close to her ear. She felt as though she could hear Oliver breathing more heavily in the stillness. " I see you—through the telephone," she said, with her deep, easy laugh, and seemed to come very close to him for a moment.

" It's dark," he replied, echoing her laughter. " Haven't you any time for me yet? " he asked, trying to make it sound offhand.

" Just a few days more. You know how it is when a part's beginning to ferment in you. You're too—upsetting—too distracting. Oliver," she cried passionately, " I haven't done any film work for two years. You don't know what that is. You don't know what it means. Those two years in Paris —you have no conception——"

She broke off, and he waited. " Pray for my wretched soul," she said. " Four weeks and it'll all be over. Then——"

" Then——? When your picture's over, mine'll begin. And I'll be just as beastly to you then as you are to me now

—that goes without saying." They were both silent for a moment. For a moment they both felt in some blurred and formless fashion that the whole business was senseless. Film after film, part after part, gestures, pictures, anxiety, success, another success, still another success, and then, perhaps, an end to success. Meantime, somewhere else, far away from them, life—real life—was going by.

The thought brushed without penetrating their consciousness—stillborn, save that Oliver said: "Will we really ever go to Rhodes again together?"

"Of course. Soon. When my picture's finished and your picture's finished."

Oliver held the receiver close and crept under the bedclothes with it—a childish, sentimental little proceeding. Even as a youngster he had built these little houses for himself when he was feeling particularly carefree: little homes against the homelessness of an unmothered boy, driven by the vagaries of diplomatic life from place to place, from one strange land to another.

"Donka—do you ever think of Rhodes?" he asked.

"Yes—often."

"That day in Lindos?"

"The plantain in front of the Mustapha Mosque—do you remember?"

"The old Turk who showed us the clock tower. He fell in love with you."

"And the little blue houses in Lindos. We'll buy one—shall we?"

"Yes—the blue houses——" he said, warm under his bedclothes, growing drowsy like a child. Donka was listening. She could see him now, striding into the blue-green waters of the bay of Lindos, naked, golden, more beautiful than any statue of the Grecian Isles. He was one of a kind, matchless, like the Koh-i-noor. And once more she grew conscious—quite definitely now—that this was something unique—this overwhelming love—something rare and precious, in an age that was chary of emotion, ashamed of great passions.

"Good night," she said. "I'm kissing you now. Good night."

"Good night, little shell," he murmured. The blue houses—the little blue houses—what a colour! If flamingoes were blue, thought Oliver, they would be as blue as the little Grecian houses of Lindos. But he was already asleep.

Jerry hung up the receiver and, presently, when he was

sure Oliver had fallen asleep, turned out the light in his own room.

" A man and a woman," he thought, his thin arms crossed behind his head, " —how simple that is ! "

Pulsky, the publicity agent, arrived early next morning to see about the photographs. Two men were scampering about the garden with the camera. They had brought the tiniest of baby spotlights along too. Joey Ray of the Publicity Department, effective in white plus-fours, came straight from the golf links and began issuing orders. The Publicity Department felt that Oliver Dent's enormous success as Cardogan should be capitalised. The gap between this *première* and the next was to be bridged by bombarding every newspaper all over the country with publicity material on Oliver. The Phœnix Picture Corporation was prepared to stake fifteen thousand dollars on publicity. Oliver would bring the money back. He himself paid Pulsky a weekly salary of a hundred dollars for his personal attention to publicity angles, and scattered all sorts of sums in its wake, as befitted a man who belonged to the public.

The life of a Hollywood star has two angles : one real, one photographic. The real Oliver Dent did, generally, the things he enjoyed doing, the things befitting his inoffensive existence as a good-looking, clean-living youth. He rode, he boxed, he swam, he fenced, he had a house and garden, a swimming-pool and tennis court, he had two cars, five dogs, and a horse—only one horse, but that one came of stock still better than his own. He gave parties, went to night clubs, danced with women, read books in hammocks, gave coins to beggars—all of which came quite naturally to him. But the fact that all this activity was being photographed at the same time, run through presses, publicised, done to death—that fact made it seem unreal, not quite genuine, almost a fraud. There was an absence of pain, of grime, of privacy, of human travail, that robbed life of its vital quality and made it all but unendurable at times.

" People like us never get down to realities," Oliver had once said, incapable of expressing himself more clearly.

" Yes," Donka had replied soberly. " We're poisoned—all of us. Have you noticed that? There's a void all round us, isn't there? We can't get hold of things. We're doped. It's like taking a dose of morphine or sniffing cocaine—the effect's exactly the same. You can take my word for it," she

added impatiently as Oliver eyed her in amazement. "I know what I'm talking about. I've gone through the morphine and cocaine stage."

"And you were able to give it up?" he asked uneasily, almost enviously.

"I can give up anything I make up my mind to give up—" and depositing a butterfly kiss on the tip of his perfectly rounded ear she whispered—"even you, my darling."

Oliver was wakened that morning by Nando, his trainer—a dapper, muscular Mexican. Wakened, moreover, at the stroke of seven. This was part of the programme of self-discipline so warmly recommended by Bill Turner. Obediently Oliver dragged himself up from the depths of dreams.

He felt pretty wretched as he stood under his shower. "A man ought to have his eight hours out when he's taken veronal," he grumbled.

"Three rounds of skipping'll do the trick just as well," Nando promised.

Heavy-headed, Oliver surrendered himself to the deft massaging of Nando's hairy hands. It did not make him feel any better. He had been wakened in the midst of a dream he could not remember. And that unfinished dream had left him with a feverish, gnawing, aching, damnable feeling in his veins. While shaving, he recognised this feeling as a longing for Donka. "God preserve us from women!" he thought brutally, as he made his way down to the terrace for his glass of grapefruit juice. Nando, the boxing-gloves dangling by their straps from his hand, followed.

"Take that damned thing away," said Oliver, coming on Joey Ray at his table, in the act of manipulating a pretty silver cocktail shaker.

"This," Joey informed him, "is for people with a little golf and a little work behind them. We'd better take you with your little glass of fruit juice. The ladies will love it."

Oliver remembered that he had always disliked people with freckles. Joey had freckles and the white skin that went with red hair, though he was not red-headed. The grapefruit juice tasted abominable. A man was trotting up from the garden with a cable in his hand, looking for a place to plug in the baby spotlight. Oliver sat there in his ancient bath-robe, a relic of Oxford days—it had been red then—freezing under the glaring heat. Jerry emerged from the house.

"Two hundred and fifteen letters and the press clippings,"

he announced, his face averted, as he placed twenty picked letters before Oliver. Oliver pushed them aside.

"Let's go, Nando," he said. "I want to warm up first."

There was a real boxing-ring next to the swimming-pool, and a punch-ball that Oliver jabbed lightly once or twice before taking his position. The deep, hollow sound of the leather cheered him a little.

"Hello, Charlie." He tossed a greeting to the man at the camera.

"A little make-up before you get started," suggested the vigilant Joey Ray.

"Skipping first," said Nando, handing him the rope. Oliver, having donned his boxing-gloves, balanced lazily on the balls of his feet.

"Time!" cried Nando, stop-watch in hand. Oliver began skipping. He found himself working with marvellous ease and precision, heart and lungs pumping like good engines, sweat pouring down his face. He skipped for a long, long time—nine minutes—with never a second's thought of Donka. Dan appeared with the towel and rubbed him down. When Dan laughed, he looked as though he had four times as many teeth as the ordinary man. And Dan was always laughing, even when he was unhappy.

"Getting set!" cried Charlie tensely, moving toward the camera as Oliver took up his stand opposite Nando. "Hold it a second, Ol."

"Wait!" snapped Joey, stern as a ringside judge. "Make-up first."

Dan had the yellow-legged make-up table ready. Oliver surveyed it and felt suddenly sickened, as he had been sickened in childhood by the sight of a particular kind of fat, white worm. "No—no make-up," he decided, and struck the required pose.

"They can't take you without make-up," Joey protested vehemently. "Your nose'll be shiny as a cucumber."

Oliver surveyed the make-up again. There was absolutely no sense in his being revolted—yet he was revolted. He took a little powder and dusted it perfunctorily over his face. Charlie threw Joey a hesitant glance. Joey sighed.

"Light!" cried Charlie, and the spotlight started humming away through the dazzling sunshine that flooded the garden. Oliver assumed the proper boxing pose, guarding himself lightly with his gloved fists. His muscles were playing.

Nando, who had been photographed a hundred times, sparring with stars, placed himself automatically so as not to conceal an inch of the precious objective.

"Ready?" cried Joey, every nerve strained. "Go!"

They were the words of command used in the studio. The instant they were spoken, Oliver burst into a brilliant smile.

Having got that over, he took Nando on for three rounds in good earnest. Nando boxed cautiously, but Oliver hit fairly hard. He had a splendid straight left, and felt happy as long as he was boxing. One blow caught him in the pit of the stomach. His lips turned white, but he smiled. He thought he had taken the blow very well, wretched though it made him feel. But Nando saw him sway forward, stagger and regain his balance, and regretted the accuracy of his aim.

The boxing finished, they ran round the pool for a while, then engaged in a brief swimming contest—all of which, sport for its own sake though it was, was being constantly interrupted for poses and photographs. Oliver was pretty thoroughly winded when a halt was called and the whole party proceeded to the kennels, descending the steps past the big blue tubs of agaves to the lower level of the garden, where they could see far and wide over the flat city that lay shimmering in the heat.

"Do you ever feel," inquired Oliver abruptly, "that it might be pleasant to drop into a bunch of those cactus leaves on your bare backside?" His companions laughed and, after a moment's blank survey, Oliver joined in their laughter.

The five dogs set up a clamour as their master appeared. They were beautiful dogs—famous thoroughbreds—and rather obstreperous. Pluck, a phlegmatic, unprincipled Chow, was the only one that took kindly to being photographed. Oliver loved him best because Pluck was difficult to win—a spoiled and wayward favourite. Oliver sometimes allowed him to sleep in his bedroom. He sometimes found himself wishing desperately that Pluck might return his love—come and lick his hands with his warm blue tongue, as Tobias, the tempestuous little Sealyham, did far too frequently. But Pluck would lick no one's hand.

Hardly was Oliver lying outstretched on the massage bench when he caught himself thinking of Donka again. He could not help himself; there was nothing he could do about it. Getting along without whisky was mere child's play. Self-discipline. But he had to have Donka—for the time being.

A little groan escaped him—Nando was hurting him.

"What is it?" asked Nando, drawing his arm across his forehead.

"Nothing," muttered Oliver. "You have such a damnable way of poking me in the stomach."

Nando was muttering too. There was no pleasing him that morning. He was not satisfied with Oliver's weight. Oliver had lost, which he had no business to do. He did not like Oliver's skin. Plucking it between two fingers, he pulled it away from the ribs and let it spring back.

"What's wrong with my skin?" asked Oliver uneasily. He was a little in love with himself, with the taut, lustreless sheen of his own body.

"It won't turn red. It's lazy," grumbled Nando. Oliver was not listening. He was thinking of Donka again. It was sheer insanity.

Oliver had no lofty opinion of women. He was slow to take fire and never lost his head. He had never taken the trouble to win a woman. He had at times—rarely enough—through indolence, through boredom, through politeness—allowed himself to be won. He played the lover in all his films, and in the dreams of millions of women. In life he had never been the lover—till Donka came. All women must have seemed shameless to a man like Oliver. They stood too thickly planted in his way, too expectant, offering themselves too boldly. He did not think much of them—of their glances, their clothes, their perfumes, their hints, their chance little touches that left him cold. With Donka it had been different.

Just as Nando started rubbing him down with an essence that smelt of peat and wintergreen and stung, sharp and cold, into his skin, he was seized by a brilliant and comforting idea. If Donka had gone to bed at three, she must still be asleep at nine. Every contract guaranteed an interval of twelve hours between one day's shooting and the next. It would be a simple matter to drive along the coast, so that Donka should find him standing at her bedside when she awoke.

He took the roadster and drove himself. The breath of morning still lingered in the air, though it was already growing hot. He drove slowly at first, along Sunset Boulevard, then faster and faster, more and more impatiently, toward the coast, till at length he was racing perilously down the steep curve that led to the houses of Santa Monica. He did not even take the time to park his car, but left it standing on a weed-grown, abandoned railway siding and hurried into the house.

Donka's bedroom was vacant and in perfect order. A couple of bank statements lay on the little desk. Donka used no perfumes—it was one of her caprices—yet the fragrance of Donka lingered here. Oliver tramped down the narrow staircase. The house seemed absolutely dead. In the small, circular, yellow-walled breakfast-room he came on a plate with a half-eaten nectarine. Exasperated though he was, Oliver laughed. It was such a common thing to encounter Donka, carrying a gnawed fruit stone pensively about with her, not knowing where to lay it down. He called various names through the house: Applequist, Takus, Manuela. Nothing. Finally he encountered Wang, the little Chinese, in the hall, trying sheepishly to pull on a pair of shoes. He had been going around barefoot, swathing chairs in dull, freshly laundered chintz covers. He answered Oliver's impatient queries with a vague gesture of the hand. Oliver's eyes followed the thin, yellow finger that seemed to be pointing seaward.

The beach houses of Santa Monica are built close together: no distance separates neighbour from neighbour there. In front of each house lies a small enclosed sand plot; then comes a narrow strip of beach; then the sea. The waves of the Pacific run high here—dark, heavy waters permeated with iodine and bitterness and salt. Oliver's dazzled eyes hunted about for Donka's red bathing-cap. The water was already alive with people, many of whom recognised and waved to him. A little float was anchored farther out, and if Donka were to be found anywhere it would be there. Oliver went to the cabin where his bathing-suit hung, dry now and covered with sand from his last swim in the ocean. He surveyed himself in the mirror for a moment as he changed his clothes—it was dusky in here and smelt of turpentine. His skin was good, in spite of Nando's grumbling—hot and yearning to get into the water. But it shrank, as he entered the sea, from the first high, rough wave against which he was buffeted.

Donka was not on the float, nor anywhere else within sight. Disappointed and rather breathless, Oliver stretched himself out on the wet boards. He was possessed now by a gnawing determination to find her.

A figure in a boy's black swimming-suit, lying lazily on its back, came riding along on a wave and landed at the float. It was Peggy, the young actress who was to replace Ria Mara in Oliver's next film.

"Hello, Peggy."

"Hello, Mr. Dent," she said a little shyly, like a well-mannered child. She had long, lovely limbs, still a little immature, which she did not quite know how to manage.

"Do you happen to know where Miss Morescu is?"

"I believe she went in to Beverly. Mrs. Mackenzie said something about it. I saw her car from the window at about eight-thirty. I'm spending a few days with the Mackenzies out here," she went on, rubbing her right leg with the long, wet sole of her left foot. "Mackenzie thinks he may direct *Milestones*."

"To Beverly—I see. Oh, yes—*Milestones*—that's right. Nice that we're going to play opposite each other, isn't it?"

"Yes," replied Peggy diffidently.

"Well," remarked Oliver, in the act of gliding into the water, "I've got to be getting on."

Peggy swam beside him, her face turned attentively toward him, but he said nothing more. He had the feeling that the short stretch from the float to the shore was taxing his strength, which was absurd. He landed under a wave instead of on top, and swallowed a quantity of water.

"Careful!" warned Peggy, as he emerged just in time to meet the next wave that was making ready to engulf him. He put up a game fight, though he felt none too happy in the process. There was a strong undertow here—notoriously treacherous, that kept dragging you out. Plenty of people were drowned every Sunday in the waters of this sparkling coast. Peggy stayed pluckily at his side till, gasping for breath, he touched bottom.

"Thanks," he said. "You're a good kid, Peggy." She sprinted madly away.

Oliver put his hand to his heart. The sky, at which he was staring, went black for a couple of seconds. Irritated by so much weakness, he closed his eyes. Someone came up and licked at his face with a warm tongue. He dragged himself out of the depths of exhaustion. A small, white, silken bundle was sitting in the sand beside him—guilty, imploring, black eyes fixed on his face.

"Tobias!" cried Oliver in amazement. "Where did you come from? Ran after me, did you?" he queried sternly. Tobias, the little Sealyham, scratched at the sand in embarrassment with a stubby paw.

He was one of Oliver's five dogs, and he loved his master more passionately than any of the others, but his master did not particularly care for him. He had been freshly bathed,

but was dirty again already. It was a long way from Beverly to the beach, thick with dust and dry grass that showed a fondness for sticking to one's coat. Tobias was almost always dirty, which was why his conscience almost always troubled him. It was mixed up somehow with the fact that his coat, which should have been hard and wiry, had for some unknown reason turned out soft and silky, despite all the impressive Sealyham ancestors on his family tree. He was none too robust in any particular—a delicate, sensitive little animal, and something of a nuisance to his master on that account. Since Tobias had a sense of humour, he concealed his emotions, and played the clown as best he could. His most successful trick consisted in running round in a circle after his own small tuft of a tail—a trick he produced whenever he felt he had done something to displease his master. He produced it now, out of breath though he was from his long run after the car.

"How did you ever find me?" asked Oliver.

Well, replied the dog, that was no great feat.

Oliver stood up, to see whether he was still dizzy. He was not.

"Let's go," he said. "We haven't any time to waste. You can ride with me."

This was a tremendous, an unexpected, honour which had befallen Tobias. His small body swelled with happiness and gratitude as he jumped into the car. Everything here smelled deliciously of his master. He deplored the fact that Oliver was not feeling well on this rare and glorious day—a fact he had been able somehow to nose out. They raced back to Beverly at quite a furious speed. The streets were crowded with people, going down town to their work in Los Angeles.

"We're just idiots, Tobias—both of us," Oliver told his dog firmly at one stage of their trip—a remark which was not altogether clear to Tobias.

The lawn sprinklers—ten small, revolving rainbows—were playing in Donka's garden behind the tall palms of Beverly Drive. There was an air of activity about the house, as though it were being moved into. It looked as though Donka had abandoned Santa Monica on one of her sudden impulses, to install herself in Hollywood. The gardener was there—Takus, Applequist, Manuela were there—even Meyer, the chauffeur, was there. The whole outfit was there, hard at work.

They all shrugged their shoulders, shook their heads,

and pleaded ignorance of Madame's whereabouts. Feeling that something was snapping inside his head, Oliver turned his car homeward. It was not yet eleven. He felt that he wanted to bathe again, be massaged and rubbed down again; he longed for a cool, fresh shirt. Tobias displayed the red, paper-thin arch of his tongue sympathetically.

"Shall I take the car to the garage?" asked Dan, as Oliver drove up.

"What?" asked Oliver, surveying the dark, submissive face in utter abstraction for half a minute. "No," he said then, "I'm going right out again."

The grounds of the Phœnix Picture Corporation lay exposed to the unshadowed blaze of the noonday sun. The huge yellow windowless walls of the stages threw off the heat like giant reflectors. Donka blinked as she emerged from Stage 12 into the dense, glaring, quivering atmosphere.

"Ah," she said, "it's cool here." She had been working under the spotlights since ten. Manuela held out the powder-box, and she dusted a little yellow powder carelessly over the yellow make-up of her face. Eisenlohr, stripped to his undershirt, was slipping his arms into the sleeves of his coat as he followed her through the black hole of the door. They were going to lunch. He had managed to soil the knees of his white flannel trousers in the course of the morning's work.

"Did you speak to Jig?" asked Donka nervously. "How does it sound?"

"All right," replied the director, without enthusiasm. Jig was the individual who sat immured in a sound-proof cell, yards away from the stage, regulating the sound.

"When can I listen to the first shots?" asked Donka. "To-morrow?"

"Now, don't drive yourself crazy and us, too," Eisenlohr besought her. "All in good time."

"How did it sound, Manuela?" Donka pleaded. "Not too loud? Oh, what do you know about it? Don't pester me with that powder. Leave me alone, I tell you. Were you in there?" She was addressing an electrician who happened to be passing by. "Was it clear? Did you understand me when I talked?"

"Perfectly, madam. First rate," he replied, and went on his way, reeking of oil.

"Nice boy," observed Donka, behind his straight back. This was the first day of shooting, and her limbs were quivering

with a veritable frenzy of excitement. She held out a shaking hand. "As though I'd been drinking like a fish," she cried indignantly. "Whereas I've been living the life of a nun at Sacré Cœur."

The man at her side was completely oblivious of her. He was lost in his own thoughts, buried like a mole in the burrow of his own problems. A shadowy girl followed on his heels with the working script—a bespectacled girl with the anxious, devoted eyes peculiar to the secretaries of all persons of consequence. She made notes as she walked of Eisenlohr's mumbled words. He talked a kind of private language, an abbreviated code intelligible to no one but Miss Smith. She was followed by the two assistants, young people with nothing on their minds, who were telling each other *risqué* stories.

"Jig!" shrieked Donka to a thin, red-headed youth strolling past. "Dear Jig, beloved Jig, tell me how it's going. Tell me, honestly, Jig—be absolutely honest. How does it sound? All right? What? Pretty good? That terrible sentence: 'I entreat you not to close the windows!—' how was that? What kind of idiot writes such sentences, anyway? Was it too deep? Honestly, Jig—was it too deep?"

"I think it was fine," said Jig, making haste to escape. He was very young and in mortal terror of women.

"Do you see?" Donka turned eagerly to Eisenlohr. "I had a doctor in Paris who raised my voice three and a half tones. A full quarter higher. It was the beastliest kind of work—but the results—marvellous, don't you think so? A marvellous man. You ought to send Ria Mara to him," she added as they reached the door of the canteen.

The door of the canteen was too small and looked like the entrance to a beehive, with clusters of human beings streaming in, streaming out, hanging around.

"Well, well, what's this?" cried Eisenlohr irritably. The door had banged against his chest as he tried to open it. A white-clad platinum blonde murmured an apology, but he was no longer listening. She stood there staring after his powerfully built frame till he had been swallowed up in the tumult and clamour of the canteen.

"That was Eisenlohr," said the girl. It was Frances, the little extra whom Aldens had once befriended. Aldens was here to-day, too, for the purpose of helping Frances. Through all sorts of introductions from various acquaintances, he had managed to get her a call from the Central Casting Office—one of those calls for which she had waited till she thought she

would go mad. She was to report to Mr. Granite, casting director of the P.P.C., at one o'clock. And here she was.

"That was Eisenlohr," she said.

"Yes," agreed Aldens impatiently. "That was Eisenlohr. He's no World's Wonder. Or is he, do you think?"

Aldens was in better circumstances at the moment, and was wearing a new yellow sweater he had bought at a sale for a dollar and a quarter. He was working on the synchronisation of *Cardogan*—that tremendous success, of which they were now making a German version. True, he had not been given the lines of the principal role to speak—only those of a groom. There was not much work involved, it was not well paid, and it was the kind of work that soon got on your nerves. Never mind. He was the man who was backing Frances now. He had just treated her to lunch at the cheap lunch counter of the canteen—buttermilk and a three-decker sandwich, the Phœnix Special. He had lent her five dollars, besides—for the hairdresser and make-up and such general polishing up as the momentous occasion demanded. Report to the Casting Director at one o'clock in a white dress. It was ten to one now. Aldens decided that Frances looked bewitching—also that she was not paying him quite enough attention.

"Go ahead," he said, with a gentle push. "It's almost time." But Frances was rooted to the spot.

"Do you think he was angry?" she asked. She was heavily made up and looked a little feline—too much green on the eyelids.

"Angry? Who? Eisenlohr? Why, he didn't even notice you," Aldens told her ruthlessly.

"Shall I go in and apologise?"

"Are you crazy?"

"No. Not quite. I thought if I just went in and said I was sorry——"

"Did you read in some ten-cent fan magazine that that was the way to get started? Better run along to the Casting Office. Granite's a punctual man."

The Casting Office lay a little distance away—near the furniture depots—a small house that looked like an old English inn. The P.P.C. had devised the scheme of building each of its hundred offices in a different style. There was not one that could not be pressed into service for some film or other. Capital idea of old Bill Turner's. The Casting Office had played a part in *Cardogan*. It looked small from the outside, but its reception room was surprisingly spacious and presented

the appearance of a large travel bureau, with railings to separate visitors from employees, posters decorating the walls, newspapers scattered about, and those thick almanacs which, for a handsome consideration, make a business of printing group photographs of people connected with the movies.

It was one o'clock, but the punctual Granite had not yet arrived. There were, however, about twenty girls standing, sitting, leaning, posing all over the place: all platinum blondes, all dressed in white, none older than twenty years, none heavier than a hundred pounds.

"Heavens!" murmured Frances. Aldens cast a disheartened glance over this array of blonde beauties.

"Well," he said. "Have a good time. Lots of luck. See you later."

"Why the sudden rise in the blonde market?" Donka was asking at the same moment—for in the canteen also there were still lingering about ten dainty platinum blondes of the same type.

"Probably the bridesmaids for *Billy's Getting Married*," Mackenzie, the director, told her. He looked exactly like Stewart E. Hopkins, and Stewart E. Hopkins looked exactly like every one of those typical Americans who are so much more astute than they give each other credit for being. Mackenzie and Eisenlohr thumped each other's shoulders, and shook each other's hands. Mackenzie was the coming man, and the two were engaged at the moment in a subterranean conflict, a secret struggle for the direction of *Milestones*. For the rest, each of them held a high opinion of the other, and a poor one of himself, which was probably what made them the two best directors in Hollywood.

Donka's appearance had created something of a stir in the close-packed room. The directors and supervisors at whose table she had seated herself had all jumped to their feet—a breach of those easy-going bad manners which the studios make a point of practising. It had probably been instinctive, for Donka was making her first appearance among her colleagues after a lapse of almost two years.

She surveyed the bright, bare, overcrowded room. She knew that all eyes were upon her, appraising her. She drew her shoulders together, lifted her head high, and felt her energy coursing through her neck. She was wearing a very thin, chiffon négligé of that peculiar pale blue that looks like clear white in the films. Mr. Brown, one of the younger directors at the end of the table who had not yet met her,

flushed a dark red as he was introduced. There was something conspiratorial in the smile she turned on his excessively blond young face.

They were discussing Peggy at the other side of the table.

"She's too young," said Eisenlohr, chewing at his eternal denicotinised cigarette. "She's still asleep."

Mackenzie had his own views. "She'll wake up all right. Just let her play *Milestones*. Just give her her chance."

"She has temperament," Donka put in. "She'll be better than Ria. With Ria you always get the impression that everything's been made in the laboratory. So many milligrams of this, so many milligrams of that. It's all right. Maybe that's what art is. I don't know anything about art. But temperament—yes—I do know a little about that."

"Let's hope she doesn't develop too much temperament, playing opposite Oliver. He went swimming with her this morning, and she came back a changed girl. It was downright funny. My wife stuck a thermometer into her mouth —would you believe that the child was running a temperature of a hundred?"

"Just from swimming?" someone murmured. "That's good."

There was a brief pause. Donka picked at a melon seed, crunched it thoughtfully and spat out the black husk. It was probably a habit acquired in her Rumanian childhood. Oliver could of course swim with whom he liked. She thrust another seed between her strong teeth.

"There comes Bill," said Eisenlohr, waving.

Bill Turner took one of the small tables at the window. He had Sam Houston with him, and Keller of the Publicity Department. He looked pleased, which meant he was worried. He laid a newspaper down beside his plate, and pounded it savagely as he talked to Keller. Someone at the directors' table pulled out the same newspaper—the morning edition of the *Observer*.

"Dreadful," remarked the blond young director—"this business about Granite."

Donka returned from Oliver to the commissary table. "What about Granite?" she inquired, for she liked him.

"Haven't you seen the paper?" asked Mackenzie.

"No," she replied. "I'm an illiterate. Takus reads the papers for me."

"That wretched revolutionary," growled Eisenlohr. He and Spartakus Lew were the only Communists in Hollywood,

and were utterly incapable of reaching an agreement on the subject.

"Nothing of the sort," smiled Donka.

"We're a sentimental crew," declared Eisenlohr—"the lot of us. We're too soft-hearted about the hacks who were once our friends. If Granite——"

"Granite's no hack," Mackenzie interrupted. "I remember the time when Granite was a genius."

"Children! *The Road to Hell*—any of you remember? That was 1915—good Lord, what a picture! Granite——"

"Remember? It was my first part! What's the matter with Granite, anyway?" asked Donka again. No one answered, for Bill Turner had stepped behind her chair.

"Can you come over to my table for a moment?" he was asking deferentially. "We have a couple of ideas for you—Keller and I."

"Right away," said Donka. "Excuse me a moment, children." She stood up, smiling at Eisenlohr. But he was gazing past her, a little fixedly and in obvious surprise.

"Well, Oliver," he said. "What are *you* doing here?"

Oliver was feeling pretty thoroughly jaded by the time he entered the canteen. Only four hours' sleep—four hours spent in pursuing Donka through a dream, pursuing an express train that had been carrying her away from him. His forgotten dream had recurred to him bit by bit in the course of the forenoon. The express train was a relic of one of his childhood books, *Inventions et Aventures*—he had read it in Cairo with Mademoiselle when he was eight. It was one of those idiotic puff-puff trains of the good old days, but it had travelled very swiftly in his dream. From eleven to one—after his two unsuccessful ventures—Oliver had been grappling with the problem of whether or no to continue his pursuit of Donka. No, he had decided, under no circumstances. And here he was, at twenty-three minutes past one, his nerves all to pieces—though that was, of course, a fact he did not betray, except perhaps by his somewhat too dazzling smile.

"Well, Oliver?" asked Eisenlohr. "What are *you* doing here?"

"Unemployed actor," Oliver replied. "Thought you might have a day's work for me."

Donka was still standing there, on her way to Bill Turner's table. Oliver had never seen her in make-up. She seemed a little alien in her yellow mask, not quite so beautiful as usual.

Her gaze plunged like a bullet through his heart. She was practically naked—or so she seemed to him—standing in the midst of that crowded room in broad daylight, clad in her film-blue négligé.

He thrust his hands into his trouser pockets. "Hello, Donka," he said. "You're here, too, are you?"

"Hello, Oliver." For a moment she seemed to be pondering the significance of his presence here. Then: "I've got to go over to Bill," she said, and went.

"Won't you sit down?" asked young Brown, making a move to rise. All the chairs at the table were occupied. Only Donka's chair was vacant now, a scarf hanging over its back.

"Thank you—thank you, no," Oliver replied. "I can't eat anything—don't let me disturb you." He was gripping the back of the chair. A trace of warmth lingered in the chiffon scarf.

"My God!" he thought bitterly, his hands closing fiercely round the mesh of the scarf, as though it had been Donka herself. "Am I a complete idiot?—I'm being fattened up," he confided. "My trainer's stuffing me. Polenta. Risotto. I've lost weight." Donka was not coming back. He could hardly follow her to Bill Turner's table.

"How about Mount Rainier?" asked Eisenlohr.

"Yes," he replied. "I'm off to Clearwater soon for the trout fishing. Or a flying trip to Europe, maybe. If I started right off, I could do it." It eased his heart miraculously to play with the idea. "Three days to New York—five days to Southampton——"

"If you happen to catch a steamer," someone put in.

Oliver's enthusiasm waned. "Yes," he agreed. "If I happen to catch a steamer. Well—so long," he continued. "I'll be on my way."

He walked off a little self-consciously. There was obviously nothing he could do but take his departure and leave Donka to her own affairs. Passing the huge counter at the lower end of the lunch-room, where the cold drinks were served, he decided he was thirsty. His mind went blank for a moment. The mixer eyed him questioningly.

"What shall I drink?" asked Oliver absently. The drink would serve to while away a little time. Orangeade—far too cold, sickeningly sweet. Suddenly he heard Donka's laughter behind him—her deep, low laughter through all the din of voices. He would not turn. Donka was moving toward the

exit between Eisenlohr and Bill Turner. The two men stopped at the desk to pay their bills. Donka waited. Her eyes were abstracted—it was difficult to catch them.

"Still here, Puyu," she said, walking over to him. "What are you doing at the studio?"

"They phoned me," he lied. "Some contract trouble."

"I see," she said. "And otherwise?"

"Otherwise? Nothing—nothing at all, really. Too hot."

"Yes. Terribly hot." She was an utter stranger. "Were you down at the beach to-day?"

"No," he said quickly. He was an indifferent liar. Whether or no he swam with Peggy did not matter, but it cut her to the heart that he should conceal the fact. Passionately jealous, Donka was ashamed of her jealousy and never made a display of it. But the pain it caused her was a very peculiar pain—swallowing knives, she called it. Oliver stared stubbornly into space. He could not very well confess that he had been pursuing her trail like a fool all day. They were as silly as any two lovers, both of them.

"Why?" he asked.

"What—why?" she countered.

"Why should I have been down at the beach?"

"Oh—I just asked."

The conversation languished. It was impossible to carry on any conversation here. When you were in Rhodes, the studio did not exist. But when you were at the studio, it seemed utterly incredible that there should ever have been a place like Rhodes. Standing there at the zinc-covered counter with its rings of moisture, amid the hubbub of the canteen, they both perceived for the space of a moment that love was nothing more than a balancing on the hair line between imagination and reality.

"That's not Donka at all," thought Oliver. "She's not beautiful, she's faded. God! yes—she's a little faded, a little vulgar. I was just bewitched."

"How nicely he lies," thought Donka. "Such clear eyes. Like a poster. He's his own bill-poster, this beautiful Oliver. That's what I was taken in by. It's preposterous to love a man because he's beautiful and nothing more."

"Well—*auf Wiedersehen*," she said coldly.

"*Wiedersehen*," Oliver replied, thrusting his hands into his pockets again. Eisenlohr took charge of Donka. Bill Turner stepped over to the counter to speak to Oliver.

"Well?" he asked. "How are the soft drinks?"

Oliver kept his trembling hands clenched in his pockets. "Marvellous!" he replied grimly.

Between the studios of the Phœnix Picture corporation and the grounds where the larger sets are constructed lies a pretty, unnumbered avenue lined by the bungalows where the Stars live. They are gay villas in Spanish and Colonial style, overgrown with bougainvillea and fronted by idyllic little lawns. The company places one of these bungalows at the disposal of every important Star. It is a generous gesture, in the first place, and in the second place, it pays. The villas can be used in pictures, and a certain amount of restraint and supervision can be exercised over the Stars during the progress of a strenuous production.

The little avenue runs imperceptibly into the P.P.C. scenic effects and terminates in an official-looking building, four storeys high, with a huge doorway, a couple of sandstone figures, and a rather imposing outer staircase. Anyone climbing the steps and entering the doorway will find himself confronted by a void—a few planks on trestles, the sky, and a board bearing the inscription: Warning! Danger! Houses destroyed by fire present a similar appearance. But this was merely a stage setting.

As Donka walked down the little avenue with Eisenlohr, the doorway and steps were alive with people. White-clad blondes were descending the staircase and ranging themselves on either side. A few men were lounging about below, looking on. There was an extraordinary air of indolence about the entire procedure.

"Are they shooting there?" Donka asked listlessly. Her thoughts were still with Oliver.

"No. They're casting."

"Aha. Looking for a platinum-blonde star."

"Maybe. Granite's got a good nose."

"He has. But miracles don't happen."

"Oh, yes, they do," declared Eisenlohr, as they sauntered closer. "Granite's made miraculous discoveries before this." With a sudden curse, he wrenched the cigarette from his mouth, produced a large, black cigar wrapped in cellophane, drew a deep breath, lit it, drew another deep breath, and began puffing furiously. Donka laughed softly at this lapse from grace, then turned a preoccupied gaze on the girls tripping down the staircase. They looked exactly alike. It was virtually impossible to distinguish one from another. Her

heart was still wrung by the memory of her brief conversation with Oliver. Curious, how dead a thing could suddenly be, that had just been alive. What puppets these girls were! Remarkable climate, Hollywood's—everything dried up here. Oliver—she pushed the thought of him aside. That unpleasant sentence in the next scene: "If you make another move, I'll shoot. If you——" Imbeciles, those writers! "If you move, I'll shoot." Much simpler. "If you move once——" And Oliver had looked as though something were hurting him. Oh, Oliver——

"What did Bill want of you?" asked Eisenlohr.

"Nothing. Something about publicity. Rather sickening. I think he wants to exploit my relations with Dent. What an immoral creature this Morescu is!—but what sex appeal! You know—something of that kind. Disgusting!"

"It'll be good for you."

"Good for me?" she inquired haughtily. "Why not good for Dent?"

"You exploited it yourself, you know, darling."

Did I? she thought, appalled.

"Did I?" she asked aloud. The blood rushed so violently to her face that she could feel it beating against the paint, as though the paint were a wall. "We're poisoned," she thought again. "They've poisoned us. We're all poisoned."

Eisenlohr scrutinised her, took the cigar from his mouth, scrutinised the cigar, scrutinised the blondes descending the steps. "They make you sick," he said. "Aren't they enough to make you sick?"

"Hello, Eisenlohr." A tall, ash-blond young man came up to them.

"*Tag, Aldens. Wie geht's?*"

"Fine, thank you." He answered in English, very correctly, then turned his gaze on Donka. She looked beautiful but quite old, he thought, when you saw her close. Eisenlohr was thinking just the opposite.

"What a human face!" he was thinking, as he took his eyes from the blondes to fix them on Donka. "Twenty years in pictures, and still a human being."

"Come alone," he said. "Let's get over to our little set—nice, pretty, cool little set. We'll get sunstroke here."

"In a moment," she replied. "There's Granite," and walked the few steps that brought her to the foot of the staircase.

Granite, the casting director, a little notebook in his hand,

was sitting on a small chair—sitting as motionless as though he were asleep or posing for a tableau. He looked ludicrous. He was an extremely stout, heavy man, and the little chair was far too small for him, as his head was far too small for his bulky neck. His hair was a beautiful colour—a shimmering chestnut gold—and sprang in a fine curve from his forehead. Two gleaming little trickles of perspiration were running from his hair down his neck and into the flashy design of the blue sweater that clung to his shoulders. To see Granite seated and motionless was unusual. He was one of those brisk, active, energetic fat men, with spongy yet muscular flesh—men who are always on their feet, always exercising, always dieting, and who, as a result of some glandular disturbance, grow daily fatter and more ludicrous.

"Hello, Granite," said Donka. He did not hear her greeting, he did not move. Fountain-pen and notebook clutched in his hands, he was watching the blondes. His hairy hands were strikingly slender and sensitive. Donka knew them well, those hands; she recognised them with a smile. The hands had remained the same, while the tempestuous, gifted young Granite had been turning into an unwholesomely fat casting director. She peered over his shoulder at the notebook. It was covered with strange drawings—graves and crosses, graves and crosses—a tiny, overcrowded cemetery.

"Hello, Granite," said Donka again, putting her hand on his shoulder. This time he turned his face toward her—slowly, and as though he were in pain. Donka started in fright.

Granite had never been freckled. He was freckled to-day. His face was so ghastly pale that the brownish spots stood out all over it. Donka had eaten horse-meat in her youth, and she saw that Granite's face had the same yellowish tinge as the flesh of butchered horses. The left eye was ringed with blue, and the upper lip was a little swollen, producing a lamentably sulky expression. The fact that he was trying to smile with that swollen lip only made matters worse. Donka pulled herself together.

"What's the matter?" she said lightly. "Motor accident?" Granite stared at her without replying.

"Go on," he said to the staircase, and the doorway spat forth the next girl.

"Virgins wholesale," remarked Eisenlohr, joining them. "Freshly painted virgins, cheap. You need six and you get

fifty to pace for you. Why do they always pace—the virgins?"

Granite made no reply. He drew a little grave in his little book. His hand seemed to be crippled.

"You never can tell what's wrong with a woman till you've seen her walk." It was the blond young director who had been at their table, explaining eagerly, officiously. This was his first picture, and he was taking it over-seriously. "The erotic qualities," he pointed out hastily, "the spiritual qualities —the capacity to let oneself go——" Donka eyed his mouth mockingly.

"Well," observed Eisenlohr, "when you find a virgin who'll really let herself go, send her to me." He parted reluctantly from the gnawed remnant of his cigar. Aldens promptly proffered cigarettes. He was familiar with his erstwhile friend's frantic mania for smoking and anxious to keep him in good humour. It was the submissive, futile gesture of subordinates the world over to superiority and influence.

"Next," said Granite. It was Frances who emerged from the doorway this time. She raised her lashes, smiled affectedly, extended her dainty foot and descended the stairs, slender and a little too winning. Aldens thought her enchanting.

"I think that one's enchanting," he said aloud. It was spontaneous, but it did not ring true.

Eisenlohr screwed up his eyes and surveyed Frances. A little constrained, she reached the bottom of the steps and joined the line below. Young Brown was looking at Eisenlohr. A second elapsed.

"No," said Eisenlohr, turned, and took his departure.

"No," echoed Brown.

Granite's crippled hand had drawn a cross before the two directors spoke.

"*Au revoir*, Granite," said Donka, taking her hand hesitantly from his shoulder. He made no reply. As she turned to go, she was conscious of the young director's gaze following her—conscious of her own beautiful, swinging gait—of the overlong strides she took, as befitted a woman with such strongly marked eyebrows as hers.

"What's wrong with Granite, anyway?" she asked, having overtaken Eisenlohr.

"Haven't you heard anything? Haven't you read anything? Terrific scandal. He looks frightful, doesn't he?"

"Yes. Pretty bad."

"He found out his wife was betraying him."

"Didn't he know it?"

"Apparently not. Old rule of the game—the husband's the last to find out."

"Dear God! she's been doing nothing else for the last five years, the little slut. Who was it? Adolfi?"

"Martinez this time. The fellow that plays gangsters for the Astor Company. She seems to have a weakness for Latins."

"Did Granite thrash him?"

"Much worse," said Eisenlohr. "He thrashed his wife. Hell!" he added, spitting out his cigarette. Donka waited. They had ploughed through the heat and reached the door of Stage 12.

"Granite got wind of the fact that they were at Arrowhead Lake together. Started for Arrowhead at six in the morning. Got there a little after nine. Found them breakfasting on the terrace. And what does the sap do? Beats up his wife!"

"That's bad."

"Horrible. He'll never live it down. Beats up his wife! Martinez knocks him down, and now Martinez is a swell guy, Mrs. Granite's an abused angel, and Granite's ruined himself for life. They'll have to fire him. Absolute imbecile. Beats up his wife in broad daylight! You can imagine the hell that's going to break loose now."

"Poor fellow! I like him. What's more, he was perfectly right. I like people who do the wrong thing—the thing that works harm to themselves. Just the same, how can a man who looks like Granite expect fidelity?"

"H'm," reflected Eisenlohr. "How can any human being expect fidelity? Tremendous problem, Madame Morescu, what?"

Donka laughed. She had once had a brief affair with Eisenlohr, and left him rather abruptly for a man who had come out of Arizona to ride bucking bronchos in Wild West films.

"Come along," said Eisenlohr. "It's two minutes past two. Got to work now and then."

Donka promptly abandoned the unfortunate Granite to return to her role. "Can't you change that horrible sentence for me? 'If you make a single move more, I'll shoot.' I'll twist my tongue off saying it. I'm afraid of it. Can't I say: 'If you move, I'll shoot,' or, 'If you——'"

"No, my darling," Eisenlohr said. "You just read your lines the way clever people wrote them. You'll do it magnificently." He pushed back the heavy iron door and, as he waited for her to precede him, stuck another denicotinised cigarette between his lips.

Oliver's day went from bad to worse. He tried to sleep—it was too hot. He tried to swim—it was too exhausting. He sat for a while in the tepid water that flooded the tiled steps of the swimming-pool, his mind a vacuum. Some large, dead grubs floating on the surface drove him away.

The house, with its shades and curtains drawn, was suffocating. The sun blazed down on the garden. Dan was standing on the terrace with a garden hose, cooling off the red tiles. Oliver went in search of Pluck, the Chow. He wanted to play with him. But Pluck had no desire to play. Tobias had—he begged, he entreated, he dragged out objects that he wanted thrown to him to fetch—bits of stick, an old tennis ball, and finally, with the jocular air of an experienced comic, a whole heavy brick.

"Don't bother me," said Oliver.

Tobias, abashed, flattened himself against the ground, his hind legs outstretched.

Since Pluck did not want to play, Jerry was summoned. Jerry and Oliver played a game of chess on the terrace. Oliver was a poor player, and it irked him to see how flagrantly Jerry was trying to give him the game. They played backgammon, but Oliver's wits were wool-gathering, and he lost at that, too. They babbled listlessly of the Henley regatta that was to take place next week, of the possibility of catching the *Europa* in New York and thus reaching England in time for the regatta. Oliver finally fell silent, his gaze fixed on the town below. Hollywood had lost all its contours in the heat. It was no more than a misty tremor, and the hills of the Sierras had receded far into the distance. That circular glitter not far from Pico Boulevard must be the huge, silvery water-tank of the P.P.C. Oliver kept his eyes glued to it as though it were a target.

At five he sent Jerry to the telephone: was Madame Morescu still on the set? Yes, came the reply, she was still on the set.

"I'll have Dan drive me this time," said Oliver feebly. It was twenty minutes past five when, for the second time that day, the gateman admitted him to the P.P.C. lot.

Directing Dan to wait outside Stage 12, Oliver went in, passing first through a short corridor, then through the heavy iron door. An electric bulb glowed red, the signal for silence, and Oliver halted in his tracks till a siren's wail indicated that the shooting was over and movement permissible. The air was heavy with the smell of wooden planks and of jute stretched over the walls. Oliver tiptoed over cables in the gloom, passed behind the set, reached the camera, and edged his way back into the shadows to wait.

The electricians, sitting crouched with their spots above and below, to the left and the right and all over the place, had pulled the plugs of their lamps, for the man seated with a book in the background was watching to see that no money was wasted. The place reeked of hot shellac and, though the light shed by a single lamp was dim and cold, the atmosphere was sweltering.

The set represented an old-fashioned bedroom, its realism destroyed by a bed that looked rather too like a cocotte's. The pillows and coverings were encased in a bluish silk, the colour of Donka's négligé. Donka was seated on the bed's edge, with Eisenlohr beside her. They were talking in undertones. The cameraman was whispering to his assistant. He was a highly strung, hysterical individual named Piluyeff, who had come to Hollywood armed with a host of obscure Russian ideas on camera angles. The electricians communicated with each other in low monosyllables. The microphone, protruding into the scene at the end of a long arm, moved fantastically as some Martian monster. And though there was an air of quiet and leisureliness and indolence about all the proceedings, Oliver was quick to recognise the atmosphere of strained effort. He waited. He had to wait a long time, but Oliver Dent, the star, had learned the unlimited patience demanded by the films. Finally the lights were properly adjusted, the camera properly adjusted, the microphone properly adjusted. Eisenlohr rose from the bed and took his place near the camera, where a chair bearing his name had been placed for him. His eyes were like a retriever's on tenterhooks for the command to go. Donka lay down on the bed. Williams, her leading man, deserted mirror, powder box, and half-smoked cigarette to cower near a table on the ground. He was a little too old for the part of Akim, the Red, but he looked well enough.

Miss Smith, the shadowy girl with the script, whispered something to Eisenlohr. An assistant measured distances

with a tape line. Someone held up a silvered cardboard rectangle that glittered in Donka's eyes. Someone else held up a slate, bearing various numbers—then, keeping his arm outstretched, gave the signal for the shooting to begin. Eisenlohr grew tense; it looked for a moment as though he were about to leap into the midst of the scene. "Ready?" he cried; then, all energy concentrated within a second's span, he shot out the command: "Go!"

Williams-Akim, down on the floor, moved. A chair overturned. Donka sat up in bed. "If you make a single move more, I'll shoot," she called. The siren howled. The lights went out. The scene was over.

Eisenlohr rose, exhausted, and seated himself on the bed beside Donka. They talked in undertones.

"Again?" asked the cameraman.

"Again," said Eisenlohr.

Piluyeff ran his hands through his hair; then they started the whole thing all over again.

An hour may have elapsed before they got that one sentence right, and Oliver was at liberty to emerge from his hiding-place. Eisenlohr was far from overjoyed to find him there and took no pains to conceal the fact. He proffered a limp hand—dry inside, moist on the back. "Well?" he inquired. "And what do you want here?"

"I've got to talk to Morescu for a moment," Oliver announced as straightforwardly as possible.

"We don't care about mandolin serenades during working hours," Eisenlohr told him. But he took himself off, leaving Oliver free to make his way to Donka.

She was lying on the bed, staring into space with a look of blissful exhaustion. It was a look Oliver had not seen since Rhodes—since those exquisitely drifting daybreak hours that had lain between love and love, between sleep and sleep. . . .

The bed on which he seated himself was a mere skeleton of hard planks. The silken pillows smelt of naphthalene, of the prop-rooms, the storehouse, the films. Donka's eyes were returning to him from far places—he could see that—still, they were returning.

"Oliver—you—" she said wonderingly.

"Listen," he told her curtly. "I must see you to-night."

"Yes? Must you?"

"Yes. I can't stand it any longer. I've been chasing around like a fool all day—down to the beach, up to Beverly

Drive, all over. Hollywood's devouring you. I won't let you be devoured."

"No," she said. "Please don't." The cold spots were staring down at them: the camera, the electricians, the assistants, the hysterical Piluyeff were all staring down at them.

"They'll be starting again in a minute," said Donka. Manuela appeared warningly with powder. Donka powdered her face carefully.

"I'll be dead tired later," she said.

"I know. I'll help you rest. I'll take care of you."

"How?" she asked. "And both houses are upset. Moving. Applequist's a tyrant. Rugs rolled up. Cold supper——"

"Nothing doing. You're coming to me. I'll make the house beautiful. I'll have the table set with the porcelain service from Rhodes. Would you like that?"

"Oh, yes."

"Will you come?"

"Yes."

His gaze deepened. "Yes?" he asked. It meant, do you love me?

"Yes," she replied softly, gazing back into the depths of his eyes. It meant, I love you. They had been sitting apart; not even their hands had met in greeting. They were surrounded by drops, by cables, by wires, by machinery and apparatus of all kinds. The microphone was listening. The camera was staring. Eisenlohr came up.

"When the idyll's over," he suggested impatiently, "we might go on with the shooting for a while. Time's worth a thousand dollars a minute here."

The sun had set when Oliver got back to his car. One of Hollywood's cold, damp, swiftly falling evenings had hung white arc-lights along all the studio streets. Oliver, who was coatless, shivered. He inhaled the gasoline-tainted air. He was very tired.

He told himself he was happy. But he was not.

It was eight-thirty when Eisenlohr stopped work. He was as filthy as a coal-heaver. God knows how he managed in the course of his work to accumulate all the dirt within a radius of yards. Williams took his leave in a huff. Every effective scene had been cut from his part and handed over to Morescu. He felt he had been shamefully treated and was

in no mood for good fellowship. Donka discovered, the moment she tried to talk naturally, that she had grown hoarse.

"I want Jim." In an effort to spare her voice, she whispered the words to Manuela, who was holding out a thin wrap. Jim was not a man, but a thing—a grey sweater such as footballers sling round their shoulders. Donka's sweater had been a gift from a boy named Jim—the Jim who had scored the famous touchdown in the 1928 game between Leland Stanford and the S.C.U. When Donka was overworked, she froze; and when she froze, she loved the feel of the sweater, Jim, round her body. It was rough and warm and had retained a trace of youth and daring. She was accompanied on her restless, faithless progress through life by a number of objects to which she had grown attached and were therefore honoured by names. Jim, the sweater—Coco, the leather cushion into which you could cry your eyes out, if need be—Tchaitchai, the tea-kettle for lonely evenings—Cherami, a huge, outmoded French revolver of World War vintage and a good friend under any circumstances—and Amalie, the handbag.

Wrapped in Jim's scratchy warmth, she stood reflecting for a moment on the fact that she had promised the evening to Oliver. An hour ago she had been yearning wildly for Oliver. That was all over now. Now she yearned for bed—sleep—freedom from the necessity for speech—tea with plenty of cognac.

At the stage entrance she encountered Eisenlohr and Sam Houston, wrangling in low voices.

"I can't do it," Eisenlohr was protesting. "If I tell you I can't, you've got to take my word for it that I can't," and he raised his dusty palms in a gesture of self-defence. Sam shook his grey head. He looked a little worn.

"It's about Granite," he told Donka, who showed no disposition to pause. "I'm worried about Granite—really worried." They made their way together across a narrow street and through a long, tiled, tunnel-like, echoing passage to Donka's bungalow. She had not had a bungalow for two years. She had one now—like any other star.

"Bill went off to San Francisco this evening and left the whole filthy mess to me," moaned Sam. "Have you read the evening papers?" Eisenlohr was puffing silently, furiously, filling his lungs deep with smoke. Nor was Donka listening. "There's not a soul left in the studio," Sam was lamenting. "Bunch of radicals. Work eight hours and

beat it. Leave me here alone with the mess and shove all the responsibility on me."

Sam was being unjust. The music of a brass band in rehearsal boomed overhead. They were still shooting on three of the sets, and busy trucks were hauling muffled objects out to the lot where the night shift was on duty, constructing a scene for *Night of Destiny*. Scattered lights gleamed everywhere behind office windows, and employees sped silently through the streets.

"Granite's locked himself in," Sam continued. "I don't want any trouble with him. We haven't had a suicide here for four years. The last one was only a chorus girl, and it gave us a hell of a time."

"Well," remarked Eisenlohr coolly, shifting his cigar to the corner of his mouth, "all the suicides I know are still in the land of the living."

"You're a sweet, sympathetic soul," commented Sam. "Profound German sensibility. After all, you can't let the fellow die on your hands. Bill had a talk with him this afternoon—fired him. Gets a nice little cheque and good-bye. 'Better lay low for a while,' says Bill. The man just stood there—well—— I had the fun of witnessing the interview. Then off goes Bill to his tart in San Francisco. 'See that things go smoothly,' he says. How'm I going to see that things go smoothly when he locks himself in? You've got to talk to him, Eisenlohr. He's more likely to listen to you. You've got one of these suggestive personalities, haven't you? Well, why don't you use it once in a while?"

"Good God!" cried Eisenlohr, flinging his cigar away. "Can't you understand anything? I'm not the man to console Granite. I—I've been—too intimate with his wife. Do you get it now?"

"Oh—I see. I see—you're one of those——"

"Yes. I'm one of those, and God knows I'm not proud of it. But I've got a little too much—sense of decency to play comforter to the husband into the bargain. Good night. Good night, Donka. To-morrow at nine. The second garden scene first."

"Well," wailed Sam, "what am I going to do with this blasted Granite now? I'm supposed to be a business man, not a specialist in advanced psychology."

They were standing outside Donka's bungalow. Her hand was on the knob, and the chill of the grass struck upward to her knees. "He's locked himself in?" she asked. She

could visualise it all—not as anything real, but as a scene from a picture.

"Yes. In his office. He's moving around in there, and he's got the door bolted. He cried when Bill talked to him."

Donka's hand dropped slowly from the knob, and she went on with Sam, past the canteen, and over to the Casting Office. The anteroom was lighted, but the rest of the windows were dark. It seemed to have no reason for its existence—that vacant room, with its posters and smiling photographs and its atmosphere laden with the stale perfumes of all the chorus girls who passed that way daily. A sound like the rustling of paper was audible behind the door of Granite's office.

Sam turned the knob. "Granite!" he called. But the door was locked, and no answer was forthcoming. "Granite!" cried Sam. "Morescu's here. She wants to talk to you." No answer. Next moment they heard an object overturn. Granite had apparently stumbled against something.

"Why has he turned out the light?" whispered Donka.

Sam shrugged. "We've got to get him out of there. We've got to get him good and drunk—take him to Florence's—get him a bunch of girls—or play a good stiff poker game with him——" He regarded Donka helplessly. She knocked at the door again and called Granite's name, but there was no answer.

"You don't want to have it broken down, do you?" she asked in a low voice.

"No," replied Sam curtly. They returned to Donka's bungalow.

"That's the idiotic part of it," Sam grumbled. "You see it in the papers every day. They never break down the door till the worst happens. Well, good night, and thanks very much. It's not your funeral—this rotten business. I'll just go to my office like a nice boy and spend the night there. After all, we're not tired. We only work sixteen hours a day, don't we? Good night."

Donka's bungalow had a high-ceiled living-room and a tiny kitchen below, with a wooden staircase leading to the bedroom, the dressing-room and bath. There was something a little graceless about the interior, all done in that exaggerated style which showed promise five years ago of developing into something definitely modernistic, but which failed to survive. Donka swiftly discarded the négligé in which she had been

working all day. She was thoroughly sick of it. Seating herself at the large toilet mirror, she dug large chunks of cold cream out of a jar and began removing her make-up.

"Does Madame wish any help?" asked the quiet Manuela in the background. Her black hair hung in wild disarray over her face. The maid always got into a dishevelled state when the mistress was under a strain.

"No," replied Donka. She could not get the Granite affair out of her head. The brown freckles on his fat, yellow face! Hopeless! Poor devil that he was! She crumpled up the greasy paper towels and threw them away, one after another. There was still some paint on her face—over the lids and around the ears. She wiped it carefully away.

She had had two experiences with suicides. One had been in Paris, shortly before she had left for America—that was a long time ago. A young man had hanged himself on her account—in her room, from her window frame, on the line where she always hung her stockings to dry. A commercial traveller—his name was Paul Tétain. He had been in love with her and had not wanted to return to his wife at Lyons. People have the idea that commercial travellers cannot take love seriously. But they are like other human beings, and not as they are pictured in comic papers. Every human being is like every other human being—film people too.

The other had been a woman—the forty-year-old wife of Ashcott, the British artist who had done the celebrated portrait of Donka. She had been spending the week-end at their home in Surrey, and Mrs. Ashcott had come to her room and seated herself at the mirror. They chatted about jealousy for a while.

"Do you think jealousy comes from the head or the heart?" Mrs. Ashcott had asked.

"From the heart," Donka had replied. She knew something about jealousy.

Whereupon Mrs. Ashcott had produced a revolver and shot herself through the heart. It had been a thoroughly theatrical affair. When suicides were dead, they had a sneering, malicious look. They did not look as though it were any relief to be dead.

Her make-up removed, Donka slipped into her dress. She reached mechanically for the lipstick and as mechanically laid it down. She never rouged her lips when she was expecting to kiss a man.

"Mr. Dent phoned twice," announced Manuela, who had

noted the little movement. Donka eyed her uncomprehendingly. She had forgotten Oliver.

"Draw a very hot bath," she said. "I'll be right back."

Granite's office was still dark. Donka speculated on that fact, as she rapped at the locked door, calling softly. Perhaps very unhappy people, like people who are desperately ill or in love, crave darkness. Standing there in the reception room, Donka was trying to think her way into Granite's mind, as she had had to think her way a hundred times into the minds of the characters she portrayed. She was convinced now that he must not be left to himself. Tired though she was, she was eager for the fray. Situations against which she could pit her strength had always attracted her. In her roughened voice she made one plea after another to the locked door. If only the man in that sealed and stubbornly silent room were still alive! She spent a moment or two in frowning meditation. She recalled Granite as he had been fifteen years earlier, when *The Road to Hell* had been made. The funny studio in New York, down on Sixth Street—the funny role—the tremendous success. And Granite—a tall, handsome, chestnut-brown youth at the wheel of a high-slung car that could do thirty miles an hour easily. Suddenly the nickname she had been painfully trying to recall flashed through her mind.

"Buzz," she called softly. "Listen, Buzz. Open the door—let me talk to you. It'll do you good."

There was a movement inside, but no reply. Donka waited, her heart beating a little faster. Inexplicably, somehow, the duty of dislodging the unfortunate Granite had become her affair and hers alone.

"Buzz," she said. "Come on out. I've fixed a hot bath for you. It'll do you good—Buzz."

Silence for another half-minute. Then Granite opened the door. He had even switched on the lights.

He was a sorry sight. Donka had once seen a drowned man being resuscitated. That was how Granite looked—with the blue flecks on his yellow face. Papers lay scattered all over the floor of his office. Discarded paper cups were strewn about. The big water cooler was empty. He must have drained all twenty quarts in an effort to quench the blaze that was consuming him.

"I've been setting my desk to rights," he murmured. "I must have fallen asleep." It was a piteous, heroic pretence at composure.

"That's all right, Buzz," said Donka softly, taking his arm. "You can set it to rights later. Come over to my bungalow. I've got a hot bath there for you."

God knows what prospect of relief that hot bath had for Granite's shattered nerves; in any case, he followed Donka obediently.

"You know," he said, "I was at Arrowhead yesterday. That's where this thing happened. Jammed with people—streets jammed with cars. I didn't get much sleep." After a moment's pause he went on. "I worked all day to-day—stayed on the job. Had a very unpleasant talk with Bill—feel a little rocky now."

"Of course, Buzz," said Donka, as though she were talking to a child. "The bath will do you good."

She had been guiding him toward the bungalow. The little staircase creaked under his weight.

"I can't go home, you know," he said. "I don't know what to do with myself. I can't go home. *She's* at home," he said. "I can't go home." It sounded as though he had been committing the sentence to heart for hours.

"Of course. You're going to spend the night here. Just take your bath first." She led him into the bathroom. As he passed the mirror, he looked the other way, and a deep, dry sob—the aftermath of much weeping—escaped him.

"Come, come," said Donka. She helped him off with his clothes. She tested the water with her hand. It was very hot and smelled of fern leaves.

"Would you rather have me stay with you while you bath?" she asked. With the merest gesture she had swept away fifteen years of estrangement and returned to him in the past. Bereft of his senses though he was, he seemed conscious of the fact.

"No, thank you, Lulu," he said. It was the name he had called her in the old days—in the days when he had dreamt of producing Wedekind's *Erdgeist*, with Donka in the leading role.

"There are bath towels on the rack," she said, and left him. "Manuela," she said, entering the little kitchen, "I want supper and ice sent up from the canteen. Then I want you to go home and get some liquor—quite a lot—champagne, cognac, two bottles of whisky. And sleeping powders. Is Meyer still here with the car? Good. Drive fast. I'll probably spend the night here."

"Yes, madame," said the maid. It was a great comfort

that Manuela spoke so rarely and was never surprised at anything. Donka went out into the hall and looked around. It was two years since she had been here. Now she was back. The two years had been hellish. Many things in life had been hellish. Life was altogether a great slaughter-house, where people did not stand on much ceremony with each other. You could sometimes see the raw, flayed, bloody flesh quiver. Well, if it were no one else's business to see Granite safely through the night, then it was hers. If no one else could help him, perhaps she could. She stood at the telephone, her brows drawn in thought. Curiously enough, these last moments had wiped even Oliver's phone number from her memory. The operator had to come to her rescue. Anyway, she was tired—desperately tired. And here was Oliver.

"Darling," she said. "I've just come from the set. You called?"

"Yes. I couldn't wait. I'm hysterical to-day."

"Are you? That's nice, Puyu. We're treating each other badly to-day, aren't we?"

"You're treating me badly. I'm going to set you in 18-carat gold, once I get you here."

"I'm afraid—I can't come."

"I can't understand what you're saying—are you hoarse?"

"Yes, a little. I've got to speak the whole part three and a half tones higher than I'm used to speaking—a whole quarter. It's terribly wearing."

"I can imagine it would be. What did you say a minute ago?"

"I'm afraid I can't come."

Silence on the wire.

"But that's not possible, Donka."

"I'm so sorry, Puyu. I'm simply too tired—can't talk, don't you see? I can't do anything but go to bed and sleep. As a matter of fact, I'm asleep already."

"Oh, Donka, that's simply impossible. You won't have to talk—not a word. We'll look at pictures—those lovely Japanese woodcuts—would you like that? Or—or nothing at all—only—— Listen—I've made the whole place so beautiful for you. The faience from Rhodes and the red glasses that you like. And I've had all the orchids in the conservatory cut for you—the catleyas—all of them. You've simply got to come—I meant it to be something really festive—a big party just for you."

"But I can't."

"Don't make me beg like this. I feel like my dog Tobias, when he pesters me."

Pause. Standing there with the receiver in her hand, Donka could see Oliver. Her lover. The most beautiful, the most radiant being on earth. The orchids—the glasses—the treasures all gathered about him. She longed for him with a longing that was measureless, fathomless, endless. And at the same time everything bitter and troubled in her took sides against him. Against Oliver and for Granite. Against the one who was indulged and for the one who suffered.

"I can't explain properly now, Oliver. I just can't come. I'm spending the night at the bungalow."

"You'll be sorry."

"Don't threaten. You're so spoiled, Oliver. Don't get hateful at the least provocation."

"I'll come to you. May I?"

"No. Certainly not. The studio's holy ground and mustn't be defiled. Good night. Listen, Oliver—if you can manage it—don't get drunk."

Silence on the wire.

"One can only do one's best. May I phone you, if I can't sleep?"

"Yes."

"In the middle of the night?"

"Yes. But I want you to sleep."

"Good night, Donka."

"Good night."

The conversation was over. Donka sighed deeply and replaced the receiver. Oliver was still clinging to his.

"I'm frightened," he whispered. "I'm in pain. I feel as though I were going to die." But he wasn't talking into the telephone. He was talking to empty, silent, unresponsive space. . . .

Meantime Donka had returned to Granite. He was still sitting in the bathtub, looking as though he would never willingly forsake that haven. She finally managed to get him into bed. His eyes under the wet hair seemed a little less blank. He was clad in his outer shirt—a shirt with pretty blue stripes. Collar and cuffs were unfastened, and the tips of his beautiful fingers were wrinkled by his long stay in the water. As a male, he was something of a monstrosity.

He was still silent, but his eyes followed Donka's all over the room, and once, when she moved toward the door, he

exclaimed with an odd severity: "You mustn't leave me alone, Lulu." She returned swiftly and took him into her arms. She did what she could for him—held his hands, stroked his wet hair. She was kind to all that remained of the former Granite. Then she conquered her distaste and pillowed his head on her shoulder. She even kissed him. It gave her no pleasure, yet she felt no revulsion either. And a strange satisfaction, a feeling of contentment stole over her as the rigid, unwieldy body began to relax. Good-natured as a whore, Takus had once called her. Very well, she thought proudly, swept by a sense of her own tameless strength. She could do anything she liked. She had won Oliver. It had been a glorious triumph, but it hadn't been difficult. It was far more difficult to keep this wretched man in the land of the living. He couldn't get drunk, he couldn't cry, there was nothing left for him to do.

"I've been torpedoed," he groaned. "Bull's-eye in the belly. Might as well let me croak—the lot of you."

His wife was what was known in Hollywood as a hot baby. The cheapest kind of trash. The city apartment houses were filled with her like. A bit of fluff, stupid and commonplace. Granite had apparently struggled like a maniac to transform his bit of fluff into something human, knowing all the while that it was merely a bit of fluff he had been condemned to love. "Far too much heartbreak," thought Donka, "for so little." Yet it was only the love, and never its object, that counted—Donka knew that from plenty of bitter experience. It was a merry little hell of human suffering that Granite laid bare, once he started talking. The path led downward—into a mine of agony—down and down and down. Donka knew the passages and pitfalls. She was a good companion.

It was midnight. The brass band was still rehearsing in Building A opposite: they needed plenty of lively music for the weekly news-reels. The crickets were chirping even here, on the tiny lawns of the studio. Cats stole back and forth between the stages that looked like provincial railway stations closed for the night. The firemen on duty were being relieved. The canteen was brightly lighted. There were still people in there, shooting dice. Night never wholly settles down over the studio. The illuminated sign over the entrance was red and green and white, and glaringly brilliant. The motor drive was barred by a chain, and the watchman was sitting in his cubbyhole, reading what the early morning papers had to say about the Granite affair.

About ten minutes past midnight a car approached. It was Oliver Dent's roadster. A smell of scorching came from the hard-worked brakes, and steam rose from the radiator cap. But Oliver was sober—a fact noted by the gateman, who scrutinised him sharply as he dropped the chain. Oliver was returning from a mad trip through the mountains—he didn't know where he had been. He had been racing along winding paths—narrow roads, innocent of asphalt, that bore warning signs: Danger! Drive Carefully! He hadn't eaten. He had fled from home—his beautiful home, where the table was set with the faience service from Rhodes. The hilltops, thronged with parked cars where lovers sat embracing, had driven him frantic. He had turned from the town, thick-coated with magic, with lights, with women, with gambling clubs, dance halls, little houses, jazz bands. He had sped into the darkness, found himself in a dangerous canyon, through which bootleggers with cocked revolvers carried their wares from San Francisco by night. He had driven into the unknown, pursuing nothing but the headlights of his own car—down into dry waterbeds—up and up and up where animals glided across his path and the air reeked of skunks—and down from the heights once more, to come out on a street under process of construction. At many spots red-lit signs cautioned motorists against perilous curves and drops, while other equally perilous spots had been left unguarded. Oliver welcomed the latter—they distracted him—took his mind off Donka for a while. Yet he had ended up at the studio after all—his right foot a trifle lame, his radiator boiling, his hands stiff.

He was conscious of an overwhelming weariness the moment he stepped from the car, which he left standing close to the gate near the *No Parking* sign. He walked rapidly and a little blindly toward Donka's bungalow. He was still wearing the dinner jacket in which he had been waiting for her. He had a supercilious little British distaste for the Hollywood habit of running about in white flannels at night. He clutched mechanically at his shirt-front, which seemed to him crumpled. He wished he could get a look at himself in a mirror.

The bungalow-lined avenue was dimly lit and deserted. An orchestra was playing somewhere. A man emerging from the tunnel of Building 4 cast a slight shadow on the road. It was the one-armed watchman. Oliver knew him.

"Isn't it a marvellous evening?" asked the watchman cheerily.

"Yes," replied Oliver. "Glorious." He paused. "Have you a match?"

"Of course!"

"Thanks. Have a cigarette?"

"Thanks very much. I don't smoke. I'm saving up to buy a villa with a swimming-pool." The man was a born optimist and wag. Six watchmen had been dismissed. He had been kept. He had only one arm, and he was an optimist.

"Well—good night," said Oliver. "I'm going to spend the night in my bungalow." He was feverishly impatient and dead tired.

"That's right. It's quieter here than in Beverly. Sleep well." Oliver's gaze followed him till he had turned the corner, taking his slight, one-armed shadow with him. Then he made his way swiftly to Donka's bungalow.

The house was dark but not locked. He opened, first the glass door, then the screen door, and closed them cautiously behind him. As he stood for a moment in the dark, unable to find the switch immediately, he heard someone breathing. Then he turned on the light.

Manuela was sitting in the deep chair before the fireplace, asleep. Her mouth was open; she was wearing a hat, and she looked exhausted. As Oliver turned toward the staircase, she awoke.

"You can't go up," she said quickly. She was sufficiently alert to take in the situation, but still so sleepy that she spoke in Spanish.

Oliver waved a greeting. "What?" he said. "You go ahead and sleep. I just want to say good night to Madame."

"You can't," cried Manuela. "Impossible." She looked so terror-stricken that a dull, abysmal fear clutched at Oliver's heart. She made an effort to hold him, but he pushed her aside, conscious only of a few whispered words in Spanish as he continued up the stairs.

The door of Donka's bedroom was unlocked too, and yielded to his gentle pressure. The room lay in darkness, but as Oliver paused on the threshold the bedside lamp was switched on. It illuminated Donka's hand, that looked limp —then Donka's arm. Oliver had never been inside this room before, but a single glance stamped its every detail indelibly on his mind. The pale walls were painted with landscapes; the bed was very large, very low, very much tumbled. Donka stood beside it, wearing a faded old make-up gown, nothing left of its flowered pattern but a few rust-brown

spots. She was smiling. She removed her limp hand from the base of the lamp and raised it toward Oliver in a curiously resigned or mournful or explanatory gesture—a gesture he didn't understand.

Then he saw that a man was lying in her bed.

It was terrible. It was like a hard blow on the stomach in boxing—not quite so bad, perhaps. The man was ugly, stout, his hair hanging over his forehead—a nightmare. He was sleeping, and the room was so still that there was no earthly reason why he shouldn't go sleeping on for ever. His face seemed familiar to Oliver—a boxer, perhaps, since one of his eyes was black and blue. Donka stood beside the bed, her drooping face grown misty with her smile.

"Oliver," she said softly.

Something like seasickness, Oliver was thinking. He felt his hair turning cold and wet—his eyelids too. He must get out quickly.

"I beg your pardon," he murmured. "I didn't mean to intrude." It was a silly exit—like something in a film. Hokum. He closed the door. He walked down the steps. His shirt front was all crumpled—yes, and wringing wet.

Frances' hopes had come to nothing again. She had not been one of the six platinum blondes chosen as bridesmaids for *Billy Gets Married*. She did not altogether understand it. "Damned little logic in the whole business," she said, having adopted the racier idiom of her friend, Kit Dallas. "I don't know how they figure things out. Kind of lottery, isn't it?"

She had not yet managed to get a room of her own. She was living on Kit's charity in a comfortable apartment house on Orange Drive. She had no choice but to sit there, waiting once more for a call from the Central Casting Office. Nowhere in the world is poverty so charmingly, so attractively decked out as in Hollywood. Carefully made up, well dressed, poverty lives in cheerful rooms that look out over the tops of palm trees—rooms on which the rent is long overdue; races about in cars that have not been paid for; gets drunk whenever the opportunity offers; and drives its victims of either sex inevitably to destruction.

"They want you to look like Greta Garbo, dance like Pavlova, sing like Jeritza and clown like Bill Rogers," grumbled Frances, "and all for a seven-dollar job that you don't even get."

She was wearing Kit's discarded beach pyjamas, and her worried face was bent over the basin in which she was washing out the only pair of stockings she owned.

"Yes," Kit supplemented. "And sleep with every blessed man in the place, from vice-president to prop-boy." Kit was baking apples over the tiny gas stove—an inexpensive dish that kept your skin and figure in good condition.

"That's what you say. No one's ever even asked me if I wanted to sleep with him."

"Naturally. Why should they bother? You've got to yell 'yes' before they ask. You've got to hang a board round your neck: 'Please, I want to sleep with you and you and you'!"

This was a point on which they could never agree.

"Maybe," said Frances. "Maybe not. Look at Peggy. Two years ago she was an extra, having such a hard time she had to steal milk from the bottles outside the Franklin Avenue villas. I read all about it in *Modern Screen*. Now they're building her up to be a star. Why? I'll tell you why. Because you can tell a mile off that Peggy's never slept with anyone. That's why."

"Yes," retorted Kit. "But Peggy's a different type. Innocence. Sports. Baby soap. It suits her. It doesn't suit you."

Frances changed the subject. "May I borrow some of your nail polish?" Washing stockings had dimmed the lustre of her manicure. Seating herself at the window, she brushed the dark-red varnish over her nails, absorbed as a monk illuminating manuscripts. She sighed. They never really looked right when you did them yourself. She thought of home for a while. There was a gardenia shrub in front of the house. Her brothers always went duck-shooting during the Christmas holidays. As a little girl, before Dad had failed, she had ridden out to the cotton fields on a pony. The Negroes carried sacks to the funny old paddle-steamer on the river and sang songs they had made up themselves. You never went back home again from Hollywood.

She had got her nails a little too dark, and they smelt of medicinal drops. As a matter of fact, Kit was no shining example of the blessings of an immoral life. She could not get a job either. She owed the dressmaker money, and there was a panic every week-end before the rent and milk bills were paid. All she had managed to get out of it was an affair with a bootlegger named Light; a good-looking enough boy with a bright Irish face, nice and well-mannered and careful

about seeing that Kit didn't have a baby. He was never quite sober and never quite drunk—that was because of his profession. When he had money, he took her out and bought her pretty things: a silver fox, a wrist-watch—good things to have, because you could pawn them without any trouble. He had worries of his own sometimes—when he had to pay the police too much or when an expensive consignment was confiscated. He had a fine clientele. Kit had to go to night clubs and speakeasies with him and be nice to his customers—keep them in good humour. It was a gay life, but hard on the voice and the complexion. Frances doubted whether it would ever lead to a career. You'd end up at Florence's that way, she thought. A cold little shiver of dread ran down her spine whenever she thought of Florence.

Kit harked back to the theme an hour later. "You girls take this bed business too seriously," she observed. "It's just a way of being polite, just a formality—and if it *is* a little disagreeable, what of it? When they throw you a costume that thirty people have worn and sweated into before you, and you see the yellow paint smears all over the collar, and you've got to put it on—that's not very inviting either, but you do it just the same."

Frances considered the point. She was familiar with those queues standing outside the Wardrobe Department, with the smell of the overcrowded dressing-rooms, with the stringent regulations staring down at you from the walls, with the endless waiting, the chatter, the strict supervision. It was hideous at first, but you got used to it.

"I probably won't take it so seriously," she said, "once I know what it's like." Oh, you could wisecrack all right, but there was something inside you—something that dreamed, something that hoped—the sheer, panicky terror of the virgin. . . .

"If you'd just fall in love with someone, so you could get started——"

"Yes. That's just it. That would be grand, of course."

"Isn't there anyone you specially like?"

"No."

"Whom do you like best?"

"Oliver Dent."

"Oliver Dent. Oh, come down to earth. Why not the Emperor of China and be done with it?"

Frances said nothing, but she looked defiant. She had gone fairly far with Oliver Dent in her thoughts.

"And your young man—Aldens—don't you like him?"

"Oh, yes—he's nice."

"Well, then?"

"I don't think I'm in love with him."

"Oh—that! Is he in love with you?"

"I think so. Pretty badly in love."

"Well, then. I'd start with him. You won't find anyone better."

"Yes—only there's something funny about him. After all, he's German. I think all Germans must be funny. You never know what he's thinking about. You never can tell what he'll like and what he won't. This is the kind of thing that happens sometimes: we've just been kissing like mad—he's kissed me already, of course," she said, with a swift upward glance—"and then we'll be sitting there together in the little car, quite close, feeling such absolute strangers, so desperately alone." She fell silent, her big eyes wide.

"You're too complicated for me," Kit remarked, and this put an effectual end to the conversation.

Yes—that was how matters stood between Aldens and Frances. He was in love with her, doing all he could for her, giving her advice, seeing to it that she did not faint from hunger again, getting her letters of recommendation, hanging around waiting for her. She accepted it all. She was desperately lonely in his company, and he felt like a lost soul in hers. She found him a burden when he was around, and missed him sorely when he stayed away. He was the richer by a somewhat improved accent and a few kisses that left him hungry and restless. And he was more homesick since he had been in love than ever before in his life.

Since he had been in love he was haunted by the feeling that he was acting on a stage without scenery. There were no backgrounds here—none of the necessary appurtenances of love. No long silent walks (except for Greta Garbo and beggars, was there anyone in Hollywood who did walk?), no long, groping conversations at night, no yearning letters. They had no poets, no music, no memories in common. They had danced together once, but it hadn't been a success. They couldn't keep in step. There were no forest paths to explore here—oh, the beechwoods around Darmstadt!—no meadows to lie in, no river banks to rest on, no ridges where evening fell with a breeze rising over the cornfields and a church bell tolling from the village near by. Aldens, mellowed by sentiment, was capable of pining to the point of tears for the sound

of a cuckoo's cry, for the gurgle of a spring gushing through moss and stone, for the false notes of a bugle blown by some vineyard keeper on a mountain road—far away in the remote past.

Meantime he borrowed Tuck-Tuck—the clattering car of his friend Félicien—regularly, paid for his share of the petrol, even installed a radio of sorts, and proceeded to do what all the other young lovers in Hollywood were doing. He took Frances driving, parked at a spot where countless other cars had parked before him—on the beach or at the top of some picturesque "scenic drive"—kissed her, took her to dinner, thought how charming she looked and how amusing she was, drove her back home to Kit's apartment, and relinquished her.

He wanted more. But he, too, was a little terrified by the prospect of more.

The day after Frances' white-clad, smiling fiasco on the staircase of the P.P.C. lot, Aldens called for her in Tuck-Tuck. She felt wretchedly depressed on that day of shattered hopes, and needed cheering. Aldens, on the other hand, was in excellent spirits. He had a new yellow sweater and was brimming with confidence and resolve. The point was that after months of sponging on Félicien, he finally had a roof of his own again—half a bungalow whose entire rental was forty dollars a month. The other half served as the office of a chiropodist by day and was vacant at night. Aldens was counting on this home of his own for the fulfilment of all sorts of obscure but delicious dreams, and had made the little preparations for Frances' reception with which he was conversant through a perusal of French comedy. Chocolates, fruit, wine, cigarettes, flowers. He had covered up the parrot, put a bottle of bath salts on the bathroom shelf, and laid out his best silk pyjamas on the bed. Though the room was the exact counterpart of every other furnished room in Hollywood, with an armchair and a fireplace and the barest essentials in the way of furniture—the Spanish mission variety—Aldens flattered himself that it had atmosphere—what he called *his* atmosphere. There was his old riding-crop and his tennis racket and the lute—a relic of his *Wandervögel* days. It was probably the only lute in Hollywood. A few books, a box of photographs, a Thoma landscape which he passionately loved, a few German records for the hoarse gramophone. He did not want to assault Frances with his love. He just wanted her there, so that he might lead her gently, gradually over into his own world. She had trembled

the last time he kissed her. Little girl—little sweet girl. There was something about a girl's body trembling in your arms that you could not get out of your blood. . . .

"I'm glad you came," Frances told him. "Have you any money? Can we do something wild? I need something wild to-day to cheer me up."

"Good," said Aldens. If she wanted to be cheered up, he had no objections. He did some quick calculations in his head. If he left his watch in pawn for a while longer, he could treat her to a comparatively wild evening.

"What, for instance?"

"Well—a gambling ship."

"O.K.," said Aldens. He had only a confused and exaggerated notion of what they were like—those seductive-looking ships, garlanded in light, that you saw standing anchored far out at night—beyond the restricted zone. People said they were dens of debauchery, that they weren't altogether safe, that there was sometimes shooting. Well, that was all right with him. "Do you want to play?" he asked, throwing in his clutch.

"If you'll be sweet enough to lend me a dollar." It was six o'clock. The sky was rapidly growing dark, and the streets brilliant with lights. Tuck-Tuck clattered away.

They drove through Hollywood, which with its villa-lined streets was nothing more nor less than a huge suburb of Los Angeles. Then through Los Angeles proper. It occurred to Aldens as they rattled through its streets that this city was as large as a fair-sized kingdom. At length they reached the boulevard that led out to Long Beach. A line of cars preceded and followed them. Aldens wished Frances would put her arm round his shoulders—all the other girls in all the other cars had their arms round the drivers' shoulders. But she didn't. She turned on the radio, which would actually bring an occasional scrap of music to their ears before lapsing into silence again.

"How much money have you got with you?" she asked later.

"You don't need to know. I've enough," he replied impressively, though he was still trying to calculate whether it would cover their needs. He had something over seventeen dollars.

After making their way past countless oil derricks they came out into open country. It was darker and more deserted here, but the smell of petrol was just as strong. They lost

their way twice and finally emerged on a road with a signpost —a road bordered by tall eucalpytus trees. It had grown a little misty. The city was no longer visible, but you could see its reflection in the sky.

"We've got to double on our tracks here," he said. "We'd better make a note of these trees." He was feeling rather romantic because of the gambling ship, and drove well and very fast. Presently the air grew thick with the smell of glue from a factory that reared its white walls and huge, dazzling tiers of windows close to the harbour, and they were in Long Beach. They found the parking place, and the motor-boat that was to take them out to the ship. It was crowded with young people like themselves, a few sedate Los Angeles citizens among them. The boat was low and speedy and rocked in the wake of a couple of outgoing steamers. Spraying water sent the crowd into shouts of laughter. Two negro voices, issuing from the throats of two drunken white youths, burst into song. But when the red and green lights of the harbour entry had been passed, silence and quiet and a sentimentally drowsy atmosphere stole over the boat.

Two gambling ships were riding at anchor—fair-sized, brightly illuminated pleasure craft. It was like a fair, set up in the middle of the ocean. Sounds of music drifted from both ships, and without further query, the passengers were disembarked at the first pilot ladder they came to. They had been obliged to pay their return fares in advance: a precautionary measure adopted to avoid the necessity of carrying back free those who had gambled away their last penny. Aldens helped Frances up the pilot ladder. It was cool, and she was wearing the beach pyjamas Kit had given her: wide, blue Jersey trousers and a blue Jersey jacket into the pockets of which she thrust her hands like a boy.

The interior of the ship looked like an extremely dirty restaurant, with footprints all over the slightly swaying tiled floor. Except for the music coming from an adjoining room, it was very quiet. The place was crowded with all sorts of people: young and old, lovers, and married couples who obviously hated each other, and lone wolves. There were professional gamblers and croupiers whose faces inspired trust, and citizens who had fastened their belts below their paunches so that their figures might bear some semblance to the human form, and ancient prostitutes with feather boas and decayed teeth—shabby sisters of the seventy-year-old cocottes of Monte Carlo. There were automatic slots in the walls, where

you could risk the whole of a dime, and a few hushed, sober poker tables. One kitty, surrounded by men with stubbly beards, contained seventeen hundred dollars. Someone whispered to Aldens that that game had been going on for two days. There were a number of roulette tables and wheels of chance, and a lottery and other paraphernalia, and all the tables were heaped with large, grey Mexican silver dollars.

Aldens had a ten-dollar bill changed and gave Frances a dollar, which she placed on six and promptly lost. "Here's five more," he said. "And when that's gone, you don't get any more."

"You're sweet," she replied. "Thanks." She sought out one of the roulette tables, pushed her way to the front, watched closely for a while, then, with an air of being bored by the whole procedure, began playing. Aldens watched her from the corner of his eye. She was by far the prettiest girl on the ship, and he was so much in love with her that it hurt. It wasn't love, but it was something very potent. The dainty rococo face, with its little casque of bleached hair, and the curve of her own lip under the rouge. Her absurdly slender waist that he could clasp with his hands.

"We won't stay here long," he said a little huskily.

"It's wonderful here," she replied. "So gay."

Aldens glanced around. Rarely had he seen so much melancholy gathered under one roof. The floor swayed. The croupier had no nasal bone. Either he had been a boxer or was suffering from syphilis. There was a gruesome sobriety about this gambling ship. Aldens put his arm around Frances. She submitted, and even responded with a slight pressure of her delicate shoulders. She was apparently winning now. She had looked tired when he called for her, but she was beginning to glow a little. She won and lost and won again. Aldens suddenly drew out his last four silver dollars and speedily lost them. That was a hard blow. He came of good Darmstadt stock. Never would he be able to achieve the childish levity of these Americans. He still had five dollars and fifty cents in his pocket. He had paid his parking fee and the return fare in advance.

"Come on," he said. "Let's eat. We don't want to stay here too long." He felt sorry for himself when he thought of the preparations he had made at home. A Thoma landscape and songs for his lute. Rotten—that a man should be so lonely in this world.

"There," said Frances. "Good girl stops now. Good

girl's won seven dollars. As much as a day's work. Grand." She heaped the money together in her palms and stood there with it. "You get five back. Do you think—may I keep the rest?" It sounded timid and childish.

"Of course." Now he had ten dollars in his pocket again. Frances had seven. "Come on," he said. "Let's eat."

"Yes," said Frances. "And drink." She clung to his arm, humming the music that floated out to them from the room they were approaching.

The ship's restaurant was a small, dimly lit place next to the gaming hall, with a few tables and a small space cleared in the centre, where two couples were dancing. The waiter was a Negro with all too democratic manners. Aldens ordered. The prices were rather disgraceful.

"Dance a little?" he asked.

"Yes. Later. Drink a little first."

Aldens glanced around. "They've nothing to drink here," he replied uneasily. He had imagined this ship would be alive with orgies, but it was hopelessly sober and depressing on the whole.

"I thought they'd surely have liquor on board," he said, eyeing Frances apprehensively. "But they haven't."

Her face fell. "No liquor?" she cried. "That's a nice state of affairs. What a swell evening this turned out to be! Didn't you bring any with you?"

"No," he replied sullenly, "certainly not." This was a constant bone of contention between them. He refused to ape his contemporaries by dragging a flat flask around in his hip pocket and pouring gin into his ginger ale with the air of a conspirator. It seemed to him too utterly stupid and childish, and he had no liking for the hard drinking to which it led. But Frances had grown up in the religion of her generation, and a man without a hip flask in his pocket was to her no man.

"Well, go ahead," she cried. "Do something. Get *some*thing to drink, or I'll have hysterics. Go ahead, why don't you?"

Aldens rose furiously and crossed to the bar, looking as grim as a man on his way to a duel. And when he turned to throw a look at Frances, he felt that they were separated not by a few yards of dirty dance floor but by a glacier, an ocean, an abyss.

He was doing Frances a grave injustice at that moment. Her eyes were filling with tears and her hands twisting convulsively as she sat there before her bottle of ginger ale. For

she had reached a decision. She was ready, primed, determined to make a start that night. She had made up her mind to become Aldens' mistress that night. But couldn't he, for God's sake, help her out a little?—get her drunk and dizzy and confused—drink with her and dance with her and drive like mad and kiss her so that everything else stopped? She clasped her hands desperately round the cold, sober little bottle of ginger ale and prayed heaven for the aid and succour of delirium. Little did she suspect that a lute and a Thoma landscape in Aldens' room had been destined to seduce her gently and tenderly. . . .

"How about a little headache?" Aldens asked the barman.

"Nothing doing."

"Oh—you can't be as strict as all that. The ginger ale tastes so thin all by itself."

"Sorry. Anyone wants a headache here's got to bring it along," said the man. "Too many police on board," he added on a lower note.

"Really nothing you can do?"

The man paid no further heed to Aldens, who cast a glance in Frances' direction. She looked the image of despair, and a dim understanding of her plight dawned on his mind—a vague realisation that she needed something to drink because there was something she wanted to forget.

"Maybe Parker'll slip you something," murmured the bartender as he catfooted past and winked at a figure in tennis trousers and blue coat, standing near the bar. "He's broke."

Aldens signalled to the man, and they left the room together. In the lavatory it transpired that he was the owner of a fair-sized, tightly corked bottle, three-quarters full of home-made gin. He asserted that the gin was remarkably strong, would bring on a state of intoxication with remarkable speed, and demanded five dollars for the bottle. It was an outrageous price, but the man's fingers were trembling, the pockets he turned inside out for Aldens' inspection were empty, and he simply had to play. Aldens bought the gin, and the man returned to the gaming hall. It had been a loathsome business, and Aldens was ashamed of himself.

"There," he said, returning to Frances with the bottle. "Now you can poison yourself. It's wood alcohol."

But the gin was strong and good, and after the third glass Aldens began feeling happy. They chattered away and found each other vastly entertaining. They danced—this time they danced beautifully together—they returned to the gaming

room and lost a little more, they danced again, they kissed each other on the absurd little promenade deck stuck like an excrescence to the outer side of the ship. Then they danced again and said it was time to go. Aldens whispered in Frances' ear—did she want to go home with him and listen to a few gramophone records? And Frances, her face averted, nodded briefly. A pulsating silence descended upon them.

They clambered down into the motor-boat and rode for forty minutes, while Aldens' fingers went on little exploratory voyages into Frances' palm, which was all nerves—a quivering thing, deliciously alive. She pillowed her head on his shoulder, and feeling its warmth heaved a long sigh. She decided she was in love with him now after all, and was greatly cheered by the thought. She tried to picture his body, and the image held no terrors for her. But it was actually Oliver Dent's body she was seeing behind her closed lids—a scene from a Honolulu film in which he had flown in a seaplane.

Reaching the harbour, they roused themselves to go in search of Tuck-Tuck. The factory was still humming with activity, and the stench of the glue was more noisome than ever. The fog had thickened to such a degree that the building's contours were obliterated and only its lights visible.

"Can you lend me a dollar?" asked Aldens. "My money's all gone. I want more petrol." Frances reached into her purse. She still had two dollars left. She gave him first one, then followed it quickly with the second. And she put her arm round his shoulders, as he had been wanting her to do earlier in the evening.

They started off and succeeded in finding the eucalyptus alley. But after driving between the two rows of trees for a while, they discovered that they couldn't find anything at all. One of the heavy fogs for which the coast was famous had settled down over the road, blanketing everything. They couldn't see the trees, they couldn't see the roadside, and it finally got to the point where they could no longer see even the glare of their own headlights. All was darkness and density ahead, like black cotton wool. They thought it excruciatingly funny. Aldens got out, stood in front of the car and vanished, whisked away as though by magic. He returned, took his place at the wheel again, and drove on. They reached a spot where the fog had lifted a little and a tiny house was visible by the roadside; then it thickened again, billowing past them. A car overtook them. This was getting dangerous. Aldens brought Tuck-Tuck to a halt,

and gave the other car a head start. He wasn't anxious to ram it from behind.

Suddenly they were in each other's arms, kissing wildly. Gone was all trace of strangeness—or practically gone. With an abandon that was almost pain, Frances hurled herself into the current. Aldens' every limb was trembling as he drew his lips from hers and released her. He seized the wheel and drove on.

"Are you drunk?" she whispered.

"Yes," he replied. "Drunk with you."

The car jolted and shook. It was capable of astonishing speed when necessary, but it was too poor a thing to be driven slowly. Every jolt flung Frances against Aldens, and she would lie there quietly for a while before straightening in her seat. He laughed uncertainly and drove faster. A glimmer of light pierced the fog.

"Are we still on the road?"

"Yes. I think so."

"Can you see the edge on your side?"

"No. Can you?"

"No. There must be trees around somewhere."

"I think we're keeping well to the centre."

"Good."

Then they heard something and, even as they heard it, it was upon them. The black fog ahead of them turned grey, then whitish, then triangular. Then it shrieked, and they knew they were crashing. The last hundredth of a second before it happened seemed horribly long. Only then did the crash actually come.

Since leaving Donka's bungalow, Oliver Dent had been racing madly through a hundred hells—red and black and sulphur-yellow hells of every description. He had begun drinking immediately on his return home and never really stopped since. Twenty-four hours of intoxication, of headache, of a kind of seasickness, of a kind of hollow pain in the region of his stomach or his heart or his soul. It was all very hazy. He had drunk and slept—wakened and drunk again. Wakened and bathed—even shaved—the whisky glass hard by the mirror in his dressing-room. He had dressed and boxed—six stiff rounds—beaten Nando to a standstill. No relief. Drunk again. Taken the car—the big Lincoln this time, whose speed possibilities were unlimited—and off to Agua Caliente, with Jerry in the back seat and a big suitcase full of bottles in the

front. Over three hundred miles in not quite four hours. A few salted nuts as his sole repast. Gone drunk to the races. Betting, heat, uproar. No relief.

On to Tia Juana. The back room of one of its hundreds of dives. Mexican musicians, Mexican dancers, motley-coloured and dirty. Creoles from Cuba, dancing the rumba, their dresses slipping from their shoulders to reveal the nipples of their breasts—dancing on and on. Every one of them drunk and sticky. To hell with women! More liquor. Nausea. Flight. Back across the border to California and on into the night.

Caliente and Tia Juana are amusement resorts—hot spots built up just across the Mexican line. All things are permitted there: alcohol, games of chance, prostitution. Agua Caliente—expensive and vulgar. Tia Juana—inexpensive and vulgar. On the Californian side there are little places nestled gently among the inlets of the sea, and the Japanese spread lengths of cloth over their flowering fields to shelter them from the sun or the cool air. The peace of those places was a martyrdom to Oliver's nerves. He honked his horn, he played a concert on it, and the car went tearing furiously along, overtaking everything in sight.

"Let me drive," Jerry pleaded, but Oliver was too desperately drunk. He imagined IT didn't hurt quite so much while he was driving and running amuck—IT being that inner pain of whose exact location Oliver was ignorant. The noisy stage of his drunken fit had passed; the surly, taciturn stage was approaching. The car hurtled into the darkness at eighty-five miles an hour.

"I need diversion," thought Oliver. It seemed to him an admirable thought, worth passing on. He passed it on to Jerry. "I need diversion," he told him. Words have faces. Diversion was a pretty word, airy and rippling. Yet it had a touch of the graveyard about it too. "I need diversion," carolled Oliver. Diversion—graveyard. His befuddled mind grappled with the problem. I need diversion—I'm alive. They're dead—they don't need diversion. He caught happily at this solution and drove singing into San Diego. A traffic officer gave him a ticket. "I merely wanted diversion, officer," Oliver explained. "It's of the utmost importance that I should have diversion."

San Diego is a clean little place, with clean little warships in the harbour and immaculate, white-clad marines in the streets. Oliver invited four of them into the back of his car.

He was so sick of women. He felt such an intense craving for the presence, the speech, the words of men—simple words that could be relied upon. The marines took him to a house outside the town, with a grated window in its outer door. It was a good house, if you avoided the first floor, where the girls danced. The ground floor clambered up a cactus-grown hill; there was a charming view over the bay, and plenty of bottles in the bar. They had no whisky, but they did have gin. The gin didn't taste like gin, but it made you feel good. It tasted like hot metal and something else. Oliver's numbed and paralysed tongue sought to identify the unfamiliar taste. He drank three glasses neat. The fourth glass was upset, and the liquid slopped over the table. Jerry sat watching, sober and apprehensive. He felt a premonition of danger. The house was quiet and clean. A pretty-girl poster, advertising some toothpaste or other, laughed down from the wall, beside the time-table of a bus line. The danger wasn't apparent—it was latent and veiled. And the gin didn't taste like gin. . . .

Suddenly Oliver rose. He was perfectly steady on his feet, and no one who didn't know him as Jerry knew him could have told he as drunk.

"I've had enough," he said abruptly. It sounded extremely rational. "Not another drop. Absolutely enough." He drank some mineral water, but its cold sting wasn't sufficiently potent to wash away the persistent metallic taste of the gin. He paid, and made his way to the car.

"Won't you please let me drive?" entreated Jerry.

Oliver eyed him thoughtfully. "When you feel the way I feel, my boy," he retorted, "then you can drive." His lashes were caked with dust, and his lips were chapped and dry. "Why, the moon's shining here," he said, shaking his head as at something incredible. They started off.

After driving hard for about twenty minutes, they struck the fog. It was rising thick from the sea, a compact body, blotting out the entire landscape. They had no choice but to drive on into the invisible. Surrounded by an emptiness so vast, Oliver felt at times that he must be asleep—at other times that they were making straight for a spot where the world simply ceased to exist. The precipice must yawn at any moment now. It was a thoroughly delightful and comforting thought in his present state of mind—in harmony with his craving for diversion. He drove on and on, and for the first time in the course of the last twenty-four hours his heart was visited by a faint sense of relief. He drove on and on—how long he

didn't know—on and on—how fast he didn't know—conscious of nothing save that he was driving. Perhaps he really had been asleep up to the moment when he crashed into Aldens' little Ford.

Both brakes screamed as the cars collided, and the four people in the two cars and the glass and the metal screamed too. A moment or two of dead silence was broken by the sound of Aldens' voice.

"Frances? Are you hurt?"

"No," came the answer. "I don't think so."

Knees and lips trembling, but safe and sound, they crawled out of the wreck.

"Nice mess," observed Aldens, contemplating his smashed car. The windshield was demolished, the radiator bashed in. The Lincoln had skidded, but apparently suffered no injury more serious than a bent mudguard. The fog prevented them from seeing much, but the powerful lights of the big car, still ablaze, enclosed the scene in a little circle of brilliance.

Out of the Lincoln, standing like a sullen brown beast in the road, Jerry crept first, followed by Oliver. They, too, were alive. They, too, were safe and sound. And when they found themselves standing there, all four alive on the road, they burst into laughter—a silly, nervous, gurgling, high-pitched laughter which for a time was beyond their power to check. When it had subsided, however, they had practically ceased trembling.

"You're in luck, young man," commented Oliver.

"And you're out of luck," rejoined Aldens. "You'll have to buy my friend Félicien what amounts to a new car."

"My secretary will give you my address," said Oliver stiffly.

"Why—but Oliver," cried Aldens—"we know each other."

"It's Mr.—er—Aldens," Jerry interposed. "He worked in *Cardogan*—as your understudy."

"Of course—I see. Sorry, Aldens. The devil himself couldn't drive through this fog. Besides, I've had a lot of bad gin. I'm sorry."

"Oh, it's quite all right. I'm not entirely sober myself, as far as that goes."

They circled their cars, ascertaining the extent of the damage. Frances was standing by the roadside, wide eyes riveted on the misty figures.

"I hope nothing's happened to the young lady," said Jerry.

"No. She's fine. Come over here, Frances," called Aldens with a proprietary air. "Stick out your paw. This is Miss Warrens. A great admirer of yours."

"Delighted, Miss Warrens," said Oliver distantly. The shock to his brain and stomach had restored his composure to a marked degree. "I'm sorry about this business. But I don't see how the devil it could have been avoided," he added, less elegantly.

As Frances gave him her hand—laid her trembling hand into the hand of Oliver Dent, which was still trembling a little, too—she was not quite sure whether she had lost her senses or was still in possession of them. There was something too dream-like about that first contact. He kept her hand in his for a moment. The clouds of mist curled upward, drifted past, grew thinner second by second. Frances felt an oddly poignant sense of her littleness, her youth, her utter defencelessness.

"Why, the girl's bleeding, Aldens," exclaimed Oliver.

Frances passed her free hand over her face. "I don't feel anything," she said. "A scratch—a splinter——"

Her hand came away stained with blood, and she was conscious of a slight twinge under her left eye. She felt for the place again. "It's nothing," she said.

Aldens was trying out his car. The engine was still running, but the right front wheel was bent, and Tuck-Tuck was hobbling and limping in a sorry fashion.

"Can you get to Los Angeles?" asked Jerry. "Or shall we give you a lift?"

"Thanks, I can manage. I can't leave the car flat. It's not mine. I'll stagger along somehow."

"We'll take the girl home," said Oliver half-heartedly. He had sobered up a little and IT was beginning to ache again—deep inside.

"Thanks," replied Aldens, stiffening. "Thanks very much. I think Miss Warrens would rather go with me." It was good to be alive after what had happened. But it was bad enough to be standing there with a wrecked car on a wrecked evening which had just begun to be wonderful. He surveyed Frances in the glare of the headlights. Her lips were parted, but no words came forth. A thin trickle of blood oozed from the tiny cut.

"Surely you don't expect the girl to travel in that car? We'll take her home. We'll take her to a drug store. She needs some court plaster," said Oliver, reasonably enough.

"Yes," cried Frances suddenly. "Please. Take me with you."

Aldens rose swiftly from the twisted fender at which he had been tinkering, and stared at her. "That's absolutely im-

possible," he said sharply. "You stay with me." It sounded both imperious and rude. There she stood in the glare of the headlights, the mist veiling her little face. Those insane kisses of a few minutes ago were still fresh on his lips. Instead of softening him, the collision had made him obstinate. "Of course you're going with me," he said, his hands dropping to his sides. They felt heavy suddenly, as though he were holding a hammer in each one. He was conscious of an overwhelming impulse to let fly at something with those two hammers. Frances moved swiftly round the car to confront him and seized him by the shoulders.

"You've got to let me go with him," she whispered. "You've got to. It's my big chance. Don't you understand? It's the chance of a lifetime."

The whispered words sounded like an impassioned secret. Having said her say, she stood looking him straight in the eyes, silently, urgently. The tension between them grew thick and unyielding as a rope, then suddenly snapped.

"Go to the devil," said Aldens in a loud voice, and turned his back on her to busy himself with the car. All this waiting and wooing—all this loving and longing (it was the untranslatable word, *Sehnsucht*, he used to himself)—and finally this evening—the dancing, the promises, the kisses. . . . And after he had brought things to that point—enter the star! who drives off with the girl, leaving him, Aldens, in a ditch by the roadside. Only an understudy. The other played all the big scenes. The other enjoyed all the triumphs. Incidents from the Life of an Understudy. The roof of his mouth felt curiously cold. Seizing the fender, he straightened it with a single twist, after which his heart felt a shade lighter. Frances proffered her hand, which was ignored, and stole back to her, abashed, like a small animal.

"I'll phone you to-morrow," she said. Seventy-five per cent. of all the human smash-ups and tragedies of our day terminate in that sentence. She made her way round the car, dissolved momentarily into the darkness and mist, then reappeared. Oliver had been waiting, indifferent as to the outcome, impatient to be gone. His head had begun to ache.

"I'm driving this time," said Jerry, with unexpected decision, his thin hands taking possession of the wheel.

"Go ahead," said Oliver. He helped Frances into the car and climbed in after her. The Lincoln moved off, leaving Aldens, whose headlights had been smashed, in total darkness.

Oliver settled back into his corner, preoccupied for a time

with the problem of finding a place for his head. But it ached with equal intensity in any position, so he gave it up. Frances was trying to feel natural and at ease in her seat beside him, trying not to look at him. But in the end she did look at him. For civility's sake, he asked her a few perfunctory questions.

Was she in the films, too? What company? Did the little cut hurt? Having done his duty, he closed his eyes and was soon straying in the borderland between sleep and waking—a land swarming with sudden terrors and alarms. The silence in the car grew thick and impenetrable. Jerry was driving slowly, avoiding anything likely to jar the nerves. He was heartsick over Oliver. The fog was thinning out, revealing lights here and there, smelling like a solution of gasolene and tar. There was little in the landscape to suggest reality—it floated past so spectrally. "Sh!" whispered Oliver, and shrank back into his corner.

Frances took her courage in her hands. Edging closer, she tendered him her warmth. His eyes still closed, his arm groped its way round her shoulders and drew her toward him. He was probably unaware of what he did. It had been the reflex action of a grieving animal, seeking to escape the cold. But none of this was apparent to Frances, and Frances was in paradise. She was all tension and expectancy. He was weariness incarnate. He buried his mouth in this stranger's hair, and for the space of at least an hour not a word was spoken.

Just before reaching Los Angeles, the fog vanished as though a knife had cut it in two. There lay the town, clearly visible, with all its lights and its houses and its skyscrapers. Jerry turned as they entered Vine Street, one of the long streets which connects Los Angeles with Hollywood. "Where can we drop you, Miss Warrens?" he asked.

Frances' thoughts and fancies had carried her a considerable distance in the course of that hour. She was happy—inordinately and fantastically happy—sitting there with Oliver Dent's lips at her temple and his arm round her shoulders—warm round her own fragile, ardent shoulders. But while she had been sitting thus, her career had been progressing by leaps and bounds. She had been discovered—she had been playing opposite Oliver in super-films. She had savoured everything in the space of an hour: the films and the advertisements and the gowns she would wear, and the morning rides she would have with Oliver. She had seen him riding in the morning—once with Ria Mara, twice with Morescu—and the vision had

remained with her ever since, hovering before her mind's eye as the pinnacle of all ecstasy. It was so smart to ride, and, besides, all the intimacy of the night lingered about a pair of lovers who rode together in the morning. Roused by Jerry, she slipped hastily from her dream horse. "I live on Orange Drive," she replied submissively.

In a flash it was over. Everything was over and done with in a flash. The car was passing deserted miniature golf links, passing the resplendent squares of the beautiful markets with their pyramids of melons and hills of peaches. They were already breathing the fresher air of Hollywood. A windmill, its show windows stocked with pastry—advertisement hoardings—an archery stand—more advertisement hoardings, a Mexican restaurant, cars piling up in front of a stoplight, still more advertisement hoardings.

Over. One more block, and she would have to get out. She had once spent an hour in a car with Oliver Dent. He had even kissed her, it seemed. Now it was over. If he should meet her in the studio, he wouldn't so much as recognise her. Frances had never discovered why people failed to recognise her or invariably mistook her for someone else. She had not yet realised that her fate and misfortune consisted in the fact that she was like everyone else. At home she had been the most beautiful. The most beautiful girl in Fairmont. Beauty in the Byways. Our little beauty queen. In Hollywood there were nothing but beauty queens. You did what you could to call attention to yourself. Platinum hair, red nails, ochre-yellow skin, blue lashes. A star set the fashion yesterday, you aped her to-day, to-morrow everyone was aping her. None of the little Franceses could ever understand why the great Morescus were successful and they weren't. . . .

"This block or the next?" asked Jerry, twisting in his seat. Frances' heart sank. She summoned up all the boldness of which she was capable. Fortunately, she was still a little drunk. It had been potent, heartening gin—the gin Aldens had bought in the men's lavatory of the gambling ship.

"Listen," said Frances. "I've been deceiving you. I have no home at all. I was going to spend the night with Aldens. But I can't now. He's sore with me. And besides," she added, noting Jerry's faint recoil, "it'll take him hours yet to get home." Jerry brought the car to a halt. His girlish face with its little moustache bore a harassed look as he thought the situation over.

"Can we take Miss Warrens home with us?" he asked

finally. Oliver roused himself with difficulty. He too had been dreaming. He had murdered Donka—it had been a tremendous relief. And the moment after he had been wading into a beautiful cold stream to fish for trout. He had seen the stream once when they had been filming in the mountains, and ever since then it had been recurring in his dreams. He wasn't overjoyed to find himself back in Vine Street.

"What? Who? The girl? Of course—take her along," he said. And because he was Oliver and innately kind, he smiled at Frances before closing his eyes again. She misinterpreted the significance of that smile.

Oliver's house seemed to him strangely hollow and empty and reverberating when they entered it that night. His bedroom was on the second floor, next to a little breakfast room which was never used. Then came the three guest rooms with their baths and, at the end of the corridor, two rooms for Jerry. Oliver's arm still encircled Frances's shoulders as they mounted the steps. So weary was he that it cost him an effort to part from that warmth. He said good night, and left the door of his room wide open. It was no proper finale.

He found Tobias inside, his brief tail drumming a fanfare of welcome on the carpet.

"Who gave you permission to wait for me here?" Oliver addressed the little white ball of silk sternly. Tobias had been greatly disturbed about his master all day. Bathed now, and conscious of his spotless cleanliness, he rolled his eyes at Oliver.

"You're a nigger," his master told him. This was a joke of long standing between Oliver and the dog, and referred to Tobias's black glance in the bluish-white eyeballs he displayed on occasion. Tobias smiled courteously, but remained troubled. And when Oliver made for the bathroom and turned on the taps, he took advantage of the occasion to jump on his master's bed.

"What do you think you're doing?" cried Oliver, genuinely annoyed by now. Tobias stared fixedly into space—a habit of his when he was being scolded in good earnest.

"The master's sick," he was thinking. "Doesn't anyone know that the master's sick?"

"Get out!" ordered Oliver, striding to the door.

Frances was still waiting in the hall outside, a vacant smile on her face as she contemplated an old sundial which for no good reason adorned the top of the stairs.

"Take any room you like," said Oliver, opening one of the doors and switching on the light. Frances caught a whiff of stale air, a glimpse of flowered cretonne and a big bed. She dropped her eyes to her wide Jersey trousers, which were dust-stained.

Oliver left her standing there and encountered Jerry on the staircase.

"I've been putting the car away," said Jerry. "It's Dan's day out." He looked very pale—his face was even smaller and more colourless than usual. Oliver continued on his way to the ground-floor pantry and rummaged about in the ice-box for something with which to quench his thirst. But he was vaguely revolted by everything he found. Tobias stood near by on his short legs, his black nostrils quivering under the strain of his rapt attention.

"Stop pestering me!" snapped Oliver. "Go and sleep where you belong." Tobias threw him a pallid, stricken glance and retreated.

Oliver started up the stairs, and at the half-way landing, just where a poor copy of a good Saint Sebastian hung, the following experience befell him. First everything went purple, then black, before his eyes—a luminous kind of blackness that does not exist in reality. Then he broke into a fever which had something explosive, volcanic about it. His heart thudded wildly, and the pressure of the blood in his jugular veins was so great that it threatened to choke him. He groaned faintly and heard himself groaning. When that was over, he turned cold, and his body was drenched in moisture. He could feel his pores contract to force out the cold sweat. Then a tremor shook him. He set his jaws, but to no avail. They chattered convulsively. The tremor mounted to a violent chill. All these sensations lasted for moments only. Then his body relaxed, leaving him spent and frightened.

"Hell!" he thought. "Bad gin." He dragged his heavy legs toward his room, pulling himself up by means of the hand-rail. The corridor was deserted—Jerry and the girl gone. He drank some ice-cold milk—a pitcher of which was always kept in his room—drew a deep breath, went to the bathroom, and, retching painfully, brought it all up again.

"That settles it," he thought. "I'm quitting this place. They're making a wreck of me here. I'm leaving for Europe to-morrow." He seated himself on the edge of his bed, too tired or too stricken to lie down. For a few moments he wrestled with an overwhelming impulse to phone to Donka.

He fought it back, but the effort left him more exhausted than a boxing bout.

Presently there was a knock at his door. "Come in," he said weakly. But it wasn't Jerry—it was the girl. She was, to be sure, wearing a pair of Jerry's heliotrope-coloured pyjamas, evidently supplied by him. She stood in the doorway, a guilty little smile on her face, her mouth freshly rouged, her hands emerging—tiny and helpless—from the turned-back cuffs, a little blood dribbling down her cheek under the left eye.

"Well?" inquired Oliver. He was still seated on the edge of the bed.

"I beg your pardon—I—you promised me some court plaster—it's bleeding," whispered Frances, pointing to the little cut as though in support of her statement. She, too, had had her battle out—standing at the mirror in her room, contemplating her face, which had gone white under the rouge. She'd reviewed all the advice handed out by the knowing Kit Dallas. She had learnt her lesson. But, above all, she had been seized by an agony of longing for Oliver. It had been an utterly novel sensation, like nothing she had ever felt before, and it had shaken her to the roots. She was like a very young, very slender tree, exposed for the first time to the fury of a storm.

"Haven't any court plaster," mumbled Oliver. He drew his old red dressing gown closer about him and remained seated. He knew he was being rude, but he felt safer that way.

"You promised me some court plaster," Frances repeated. It was perfectly senseless. A girl ought to wear a sign round her neck.

"Was there anything else you wanted?" he inquired, as she detached herself from the door and took two steps toward him.

"No, thanks," she replied, her eyes fixed on his face. She had brought an odour of perfume into the room with her—a rather crass perfume. She had none of her own. She was forced to borrow from Kit, and this happened to be Kit's taste. It set Oliver's nerves on edge. Donka never used perfume.

"Good-night, then," he said.

"Good night," rejoined Frances. The tears suddenly started to her eyes.

There is something appalling about man's state of isolation in this world. Incapable of communicating with the beasts of the field, incapable of understanding the stone or the plant

or the wheeling atmosphere, he is equally incapable of understanding his fellow man, and his thoughts are not to be compassed in words. Islands, as a great writer once described it, shouting lies to each other across oceans of misunderstanding.

To Oliver, Frances was a girl he had picked up in the street, who was forcing her way into his room at night. To Frances, Oliver was the most precious thing in the world. Why, she loved him.

She stretched her hand to him in a broken little gesture and waited. "Don't send me away," she whispered. It was hopelessly inept. She waited.

Oliver rose abruptly and advanced upon her. "Just what do you want of me?" he asked softly. "What do you all want of me? Can't you leave me in peace? If you knew how fed up I am, if you knew—all this sickens me—do you hear?—sickens me. I hate the whole filthy business. The same thing every night, isn't it? Every woman doing the same thing with every man! What are any of you good for? You make me sick, you make me tired—you've wrecked me—the lot of you. I'm not playing any more. It's the most sordid, contemptible, meaningless game that was ever invented. I must ask you to leave my room. I'm not playing. I want to go to sleep."

He walked past her and opened the door, as he had opened it earlier for Tobias. It was the turning-point in Frances' life, though she did not know it. She merely felt a little as though she were dying—here, now, in the middle of Oliver's bedroom, garbed in a pair of heliotrope pyjamas that she had borrowed from a man.

"Oliver," she besought him in a toneless whisper.

"I'm sorry," he said. "We're not doing any business here to-day. I'm indisposed. Jerry's not interested in the opposite sex. It's my man's day out."

He stood there with the knob in his hand, heedless of the fact that his old robe had fallen open, revealing a glimpse, against its faded red, of the dull-gleaming arch of his chest. A cold fury had seized upon him, a murderous rage, a loathing of himself and everyone else. His lips curled in wrath and disdain. Frances slunk past him. He did not see her. He was seeing Donka—he had been seeing Donka the whole time—Donka and the lamp made of maps on Donka's night table, and Donka's hand and Donka's bed and the man who had been lying in Donka's bed.

He slammed his door behind him and followed Frances to her door as though she had been a prisoner.

"Jerry!" It was a sudden roar. And there stood Jerry, fully clothed and ready for duty. Only his dilated black pupils betrayed his excessive weariness.

"I want one of the dogs brought up to sleep with me," shouted Oliver. "Not Tobias—he's a pest. I can't stand any more pests around. Pluck. I'm leaving for Europe to-morrow. If I stay here another day, I'll die." His face glowed white, like a ghost's.

Frances stood in her room, smiling inanely. Slowly she drew off Jerry's heliotrope pyjamas and slipped into her own dust-stained Jersey trousers.

"He's got a screw loose, too," she thought. "Good night. I'm going." She drew her finger-tip over the little cut where the blood was drying again. "You couldn't be treated any worse," she thought, "even at Florence's." It was a staggering thought—it blinded you, like the beam of a spotlight hitting you straight in the eyes.

Oliver was seen at the studio shortly after ten the following morning. He dashed up the fire-escape stairs and gained admittance to Bill Turner's office. Half an hour later he was seen leaving the building, smiling and waving his hand to all and sundry. He was wearing a straw hat and a pale grey flannel suit, and looked like a poster of himself. Later, the one-armed watchman did tell the custodian of the outer gate that there was something he had not liked about the colour of Oliver's face. But the gateman paid no attention to the remark, though it was not often that the one-armed optimist expressed himself in criticism of anything.

By lunch time, it was common knowledge in the canteen that Oliver had obtained permission to go to Europe. Further details were supplied by the evening papers, on sale in the studio at two in the afternoon: Oliver Dent was planning to leave Hollywood that evening on the eight forty-five—the *Chief*—from Los Angeles. He was taking a flyer to Europe. He had been in high spirits, the reporter stated, and was looking forward like a child to the prospect of London. He would be back in three weeks to play the leading role in the super-film, *Milestones*. Such, ladies and gentlemen, is the tempo of our times.

Dr. Erbacher, head of the Scenario Department, remained seated thoughtfully at his desk for a few moments after

reading this piece of information. He was nosing about, straining his ears for something that lay between the banal lines. "This smells like flight," he was thinking. "Flight from Eden."

He phoned Sam Houston. Would it be absolutely necessary now to have the *Milestones* scenario finished by the date set? Yes, no question about it. Was it certain that Oliver would be back in time? Absolutely and positively certain. Perfect organisation. The very day *Night of Destiny* was finished, work on *Milestones* would begin. Don't, for the love of heaven, let's have the Scenario Department falling down on the job.

"The Scenario Department," retorted Erbacher stiffly, "has never yet fallen down on any job." If the Front Office would just make up its mind which of the five proposed endings for *Night of Destiny* was to be O.K.'d and used. . . . After which conversation Erbacher seated himself close to the ventilator to cool his head, which ached a little. It was a hot day. The wind was blowing not from the sea, but from the desert to the south-east.

WHY OLIVER'S GOING TO EUROPE screamed the headline of a sensational article written for the other evening paper by Mary Plag, Hollywood's best-informed newspaper woman. It appeared at about four and apprised the public that Oliver Dent and Morescu had quarrelled—that this love affair, so romantically begun, had ended like every other—with wrangling, infidelity, and jealousy on both sides. The article was largely invention, yet a faint aroma of the truth clung about it too. Oliver felt rather ill as he read it.

"It makes you feel," he explained to Jerry, "as though you had a tapeworm. They eat their way into you. There's never enough for them inside. They get in, and you can feel the suckers. A tapeworm does have suckers, I suppose?" he asked gravely. Jerry smiled a dreary smile.

"I won't have it." Oliver spoke decisively. "They've got to leave me a shred of privacy. I want Pulsky to do something about it while I'm gone. I won't have this scandal and newspaper tattle on the very eve of *Milestones*."

They were packing. Dan was fitting shoe-trees into shoes, and trousers into racks. Oliver was in a fever to be gone, and Jerry was aggrieved. He was not being taken along—which was sensible but sad. Oliver had decided after some reflection to leave Dan at home too. He was conscious of a confused, lurking impulse toward solitude. But, feeling rather sorry for

himself at the last moment, he hit on the plan of taking a dog along for company.

It was a problem more difficult of solution than the choice of neckties. He loved Pluck—the spoiled, supercilious Chow—best. Pluck was, moreover, the only one of the dogs who photographed well, and Oliver and his dog were sure to be photographed a hundred times in the course of the trip. To subject Pluck to the rigours of a journey, however—to confinement in baggage cars and steamer kennels—was unthinkable. He was too set in his habits, too exacting in his demands. Oliver went down to the kennels to look the dogs over, pointing half-heartedly at length to Tobias. Tobias was the smallest and most excited of the five. Unaware of the issue at stake, he sensed its importance. He rolled his eyes while master was making his choice, shifting from one paw to another, making a comic spectacle of himself, like all unhappy lovers. That clinched it.

He was bathed for the second time that day—which was disagreeable. Not till he was packed into the car with the bags, not till Pluck and the other barking three were left behind in the garden while he drove off with the master—he, Tobias, the chosen, drove off alone with the master—not till then did he grasp the extent of the honour conferred upon him nor the pitch of his own felicity. Almost insane with joy, he maintained an air of dignity and decorum. He did not gnaw the cushions, he did not lick his master behind the ears nor jump at his face, he did not even give vent to his emotions, difficult though it was to restrain them. He merely breathed very fast and hung out his parched tongue to be cooled by the rush of air against which they were driving.

Donka was among the last to learn that Oliver was departing for Europe. It happened shortly before four, as she was crossing to her dressing-room to change her costume for the following scene. They had been so deep in work that day that none of them had lunched. There had been quantities of black coffee—relay after relay of black coffee brought to the set by Manuela—nothing else.

"Do you by any chance want to go to the train this evening to see Ol off?" Eisenlohr inquired. It gave Donka the sensation of running into a door and striking the nasal bone—pain, sparks, a momentary stupor.

"No," she said.

"You're right. Farewells on a railroad platform are among the three abominations of the world."

"Yes," said Donka.

"Well, I'm off for a bite. We start again at four sharp," and Eisenlohr left her near the door of her bungalow.

Donka broke a huge, limp banana leaf from a tree in passing, and set her teeth into its coarse fibre. She entered the house and mounted the steps. The staircase creaked a little. It creaked when Oliver went away.

The shutters were closed. A mere sliver of light filtered in through a crack, and the lamps had been turned on. Someone had laid both evening papers on her dressing-table. Donka read them standing, stooped over the table, on which her hands were resting. "A little misunderstanding," she thought. She caught a glimpse of her own silly, vacuous smile in the mirror.

"Thanks, Manuela," she said mildly. "I'll change by myself." Manuela waited, irresolute. "Will you get out?" screamed Donka. "I want to be left alone." The door crashed behind the vanishing maid.

A little misunderstanding. He can't go away. I've got to talk to him. He can't go away. Newspaper tattle. No Oliver—but I can't exist without Oliver. If he goes away—he can't go away—a little misunderstanding——

She pulled off Tatiana's flowered summer dress. I've got to call up and explain. Oliver, Oliver, you can't go away. We've got to have this out. We've got to talk it over. She drew reddish-brown shadows over her eyelids; then, her mind a blank, she stood for a moment or two, holding the artificial lashes that looked like miniature black ballet skirts. She drew the tip of her tongue over the delicate membrane at the edge to moisten it, then glued it to her eyelid. It was a task that required all her attention. Oliver, you can't go away. You can't. You can't do this, child.

She picked up the telephone. Mr. Dent was not in, Jerry's weary voice informed her. He had given her the same information seven times in the last two days.

"Very well," she said haughtily.

"Very well," she thought. "You can go. We don't understand each other. You don't understand me. What do you know about me—you, Oliver, about me, Donka? Good-bye. Have a nice trip. I've got work to do."

She took the formal evening gown from its hanger and called Manuela. The man who had designed it must have cherished rather extravagant notions of Russian princesses. It was a rippling, golden thing, heavy, jingling, and covered

with paste gems. It was hideous, but it would probably photograph well with all its glitter of reflected light. In any case Donka had the faculty of looking both regal and stark naked, no matter what she wore. She surveyed herself in the mirror—critically, sternly. Her eyebrows all but disappeared under the concentration of her gaze.

"Oh, the devil with it!" she said. She said it in Rumanian. "*Ah, dracu-dracu!*" She hung the emeralds round her throat—the paste emeralds which nobody knew were paste. The tiara—powder over the yellow paint. Her eyes were black in the ochre-tinted face. The electric bulb beside the mirror blinked its signal, promptly transforming the elegantly appointed boudoir into a stage dressing-room. The bitter smell of paint permeated the air.

Passing through the living-room below, Donka came upon Takus at the fireplace.

"Well?" she asked irritably.

"I came along with Meyer in the car."

"Well?"

"I thought you might need me. I put the evening papers on your table."

"Thank you."

"I thought you might need the car."

"No. I don't know how long we'll be working. I'll go home in one of the studio cars when we're through."

"I can go back, then?"

"Certainly."

"And I'm to send the car home?"

"Yes," said Donka. She paused at the door. It was like one of those sham stage exits which she loathed. "The car can stay here," she said.

It was five minutes past four. They had been working that day on the scenes which took place between Tatiana and her husband at a court ball. The role of the gloomy tyrant, who was Tatiana's lord and head of the Secret Police, had been assigned to James Blakeley, a prominent stage actor who was having his first fling at the pictures. He was a vain, opinionated person, difficult to handle, and working with him was torture. Piluyeff munched cola, Eisenlohr took sedobrol, and Donka drank mocha. They rehearsed a brief scene four or five times, wrangled and rehearsed it again, without lights or camera. Donka's gown hung heavy on her shoulders. While she had been working, she had not once thought of Oliver—not once. Blakeley was having another argument with

Eisenlohr. He was a man of keen perceptions, this Blakeley. Donka leaned exhausted against a column that was a column only in front. She closed her eyes to get a moment's rest. And there was Oliver. A single line of his head—where the ear joined it and the bast-blond hair curved round the ear and down toward the neck. He was peerless—Oliver—there was no one in the world like him. Don't—Oliver—child—don't leave me——

"Is your Highness asleep?" inquired Eisenlohr. She hurried back to the scene. It was four minutes to five.

It was twenty past five when the scene was shot for the first time. Eisenlohr, looking grave and careworn, disappeared to hunt up Jig in his cell. Donka, her eyes smarting with the glare of the lights, retired to a dark corner of the set and leaned her head against the wall. She was memorising her lines.

"Takus?" she asked, as someone approached. She would have recognised the shambling gait of those huge feet anywhere in the world. For years it had been the rhythm prowling through the background of her life.

"Yes, Donka?"

"What are you doing here?"

"I thought—just in case——"

"How is it going?" she asked first.

"All right," he replied. They were talking in Rumanian—an intimacy to which Donka rarely admitted Takus.

"Can you send a wire off for me right away!"

"Certainly. Paper—pen—here."

Under a red light that hung in a wire cage she swiftly covered a piece of paper with her handwriting.

"Can you read it?" she asked. "And get it off?"

Takus held the paper to his short-sighted eyes. "Two hundred and three words," he smiled, when he had finished.

"Forget them. The *Chief* leaves at eight forty-five. Will the wire be there without fail?"

"I'd better take it to the train myself."

"No," she burst out. "I need the car and the chauffeur."

"I'll take a taxi."

"Good. Have you money for a taxi?"

"No."

"Get it from Manuela."

He turned his sombre eyes on her. "The heel of Achilles," he said in German.

"What?"

" I'm invulnerable," he told her, " but for one small spot," and shuffled away.

Donka returned to the scene. " How did it go? " she asked.

Eisenlohr was sitting in his low chair, his legs outspread. Everything Eisenlohr used looked too small for him—his clothes, his furniture, his sweethearts.

" We've got to do the whole scene over again," he told her curtly.

Donka returned to the column. " I don't know why you've been following me about with your eyes all evening," she began. It was her first line, and she had been having trouble with it.

" Take your time," said Eisenlohr. " Mr. Blakeley's got to change his face first."

" Doesn't he want to play some bridge while he's at it," Donka flared, " so we can stay here a little longer? " It was five thirty-five. The train left at eight forty-five. They had not got a single line right yet. And Donka knew—oh, she knew with a sudden, liberating certainty that she must see Oliver again before he left.

At five fifty-two James Blakeley returned from his dressing-room. His pointed moustache was a shade less satanic than it had been. The big hand of the clock, hanging somewhere among the intersecting shadows of the laths and drops, moved forward. Donka forgot it while she was rehearsing. It was almost six-thirty before the three lines were approximately right, and they were free to leave the stucco, half-column for the staircase where the next scene took place. Manuela appeared with powder. Donka discovered that her face was damp. She did not look well. She suddenly looked as old as she was—over thirty-six. Perspiration oozed through the fresh layer of powder. During the last scene an electrician had been standing opposite her with a thousand-watt lamp—one of those searching, searing lamps whose light blots all wrinkles and shadows from the face.

" Can't we stop for to-day? " she asked. Oliver was one of those idiots who were always afraid of being late for trains, and she knew it. He must be on his way to the Los Angeles station by now. And here she was still in the studio, painted and tricked out like the scarlet woman of Babylon.

" Have you gone mad? " retorted Eisenlohr. " This is costing thirty thousand a day, and we've done three lines. We've got to do three scenes at least." He removed his bulky figure to the background, where he proceeded to do some

breathing exercises. Hindu fashion. He swore by them. Blakeley too was trying some kind of fakir trick while the props and lights were being arranged. Squatting on his heels, he stared into a small round mirror of the type given away as souvenirs in five- and ten-cent stores. "It helps you concentrate," he remarked in his best chest tones.

They had only two lines on the staircase, followed by a lengthy exit of Blakeley's. The exit had to be repeated four times. Donka, standing near by, felt herself trembling with rage—and forbade herself to tremble. She felt her fury mounting and her face growing uglier and uglier. Finally, at about seven, they got that right. Eisenlohr had assumed an apathetic, long-suffering, crestfallen air. When he got himself into that state, his actors slumped too. At seven-ten everything was ready for the next scene, which took place near a rococo door. Ten minutes later Blakeley had an attack of nerves. He flung up his arms and hurled accusations right and left, while the make-up turned stiff and brittle in the deep seams of his actor's face. Miss Smith emerged from the shadowy world behind the camera and offered him eau-de-Cologne. Eisenlohr chewed at his menthol cigarette. It was an iron-clad principle of his never to allow himself to be stampeded by the hysteria of artists.

Oliver, Oliver, Oliver, Donka was crying to herself. Wait for me. Don't go away. I'm coming to you. Everything will be all right. Wait. Wait. For the hundredth time that afternoon she seized Manuela's left arm, turned up the wrist and glanced at the watch. The second hand was racing. Twenty-five past seven. If she left the studio at eight and everything went smoothly, she could still do it. I just want to say good-bye to you, Oliver. I just want to see you for a moment. She would have to remove her make-up—change her dress. Wilshire Boulevard was too jammed at that hour—maybe if they went by way of Sixth Street——

"Can we go on?" asked Eisenlohr coldly. Blakeley adjusted the coat of his uniform. The nervous collapse he had just staged seemed to have done him good. All things considered, it had been an excellent collapse. Blakeley was having a genuinely difficult time with the subtle, precise technique demanded by the talkies. Donka felt a fleeting sense of pity for him. She knew how hard it was to renounce the grand style of the legitimate theatre. Seven-forty.

"Can't we stop?" she called to Eisenlohr. "We're tired. I'm tired, too."

" Certainly not ! " The lights were on, blinding her. She could not see Eisenlohr. She could only hear his voice calling : " Ready ? "

And it was that tense moment that Donka chose to abandon her position on the set and make her way to Eisenlohr—passing between camera and microphone, picking her steps over cables, past the nervous Piluyeff and his impatient assistants and the patient electricians, landing in the shadow-filled darkness which bordered the piercingly brilliant expanse of the scene. With one of those utterly spontaneous gestures with which she charmed and endeared herself to people, she cupped Eisenlohr's face in her hands. " I've got to go to the train," she whispered in his ear.

Eisenlohr scrutinised her in amazement ; then a smile broke over his face. Of course, he had read Mary Plag's sensational article.

" The dear lady ! " he exclaimed. " You might have told me sooner. There's still time. Just this one scene. I'll let you off in time." She nodded and returned obediently to her place—an Empire sofa under the glow of a standard lamp near a grand piano.

" You take the rose from the vase," Eisenlohr reminded her, " and pull it slowly apart while he's talking." Everything was ready. Moving her hips slightly so that the heavy gown fell more gracefully about her, Donka picked up the rose. Heaven knows it was not the first rose she had been asked to pull apart in the course of her film career. Her heart was pounding slowly and heavily now—pounding the seconds away.

Preceded by a smell of paint and perspiration, Blakeley approached her.

" Answer me," he said, laying his fingers on her arm.

There was something in that touch, in that unwelcome proximity, which caused Donka's nerves to snap. " Don't touch me," she burst out in quick, low tones.

It was one of Tatiana's lines, meant to be cried aloud. And suddenly it had slipped out—softly, from between set teeth, with perfect spontaneity. Eisenlohr jumped soundlessly to his feet and nodded approval. Donka could sense approval, however mute, from whatever direction it came. She could feel it in her back, in her shoulders, in her finger-tips. She had the scene—she had it now. She turned to Blakeley, raising her clenched fists.

" Though you were a hundred times my husband," she

cried, " still you have no right to touch me. I hate you—do you hear?—I hate you! I've seen the prisoners in the Schlüsselburg—I've seen the starving children—I've seen the women lying slaughtered on their thresholds. All you know is murder, and all you want is power. . . ."

The part ran away with her. She galloped off on it as on a wondrous steed, she scudded over it as over the crests of billowing waves. All the stones of her gown quivered and, quivering, caught the reflection of the spots. Eisenlohr was still standing behind her with clenched fists, towering like a conjurer in his effort to hold on to the great moment. The cameraman was grinding breathlessly—they were all holding their breath—the assistants and the electricians and Miss Smith with her script. Donka swept Blakeley along with her into the tempo of the scene. His theatricality suddenly dropped from him; he adapted his tone to hers. She took his hand, addressing him more mildly, gently. She flung his hand off. He seized her. She released herself. " My place is not with you," she cried. " My place is on the barricades with the miserable creatures you're having shot down." She tore herself away and rushed off through the door behind which Manuela was waiting in the gloom.

The siren sounded the signal for the end of the scene.

Eisenlohr came quickly to Donka. " Good! " he cried. " Wonderful! Grand! " She regarded him with a curiously spent and absent smile. " That was Morescu at her greatest," he said, and patted her shoulder as one pats a horse's shoulder after a race. Her hands trembling slightly, Donka took the cold coffee Manuela was offering her. There were tears in Manuela's dull black eyes. Donka was crying, too. Now that the scene was over, the tears came easily, smudging her cheeks with mascara. She wiped them away with two fingers and smiled almost shamefacedly. Eisenlohr was smiling, too —the gentle, indulgent, rather moved smile sometimes visible on the face of an animal tamer when he draws his head, unscathed, from the lion's jaw.

Suddenly Donka pulled Manuela's hand toward her—the hand with the wrist-watch, which Manuela had been holding in sight the whole time.

" I've got to go," she told Eisenlohr in a smothered voice. " You know——"

" Go, go, go," he said. " Go, you cannibal! " She rushed off, her jewelled gown jingling about her.

Takus was lounging about outside, but the car was not

there. It was waiting at the bungalow. She gathered her skirts high and sped on, followed by the wondering glances of a few of the studio folk. She ran on, whispering: "Oliver, Oliver, Oliver." Two precious minutes lost. Just as she was —in costume and make-up—she jumped into the car. Manuela hastily flung a cloak in after her. Meyer started the car dreamily. His manner lashed her to a frenzy.

"To the station. As quickly as possible. And if we don't catch the *Chief*——" she threatened. Meyer glanced at the clock on the dashboard and shrugged his shoulders. They passed through the grilled gate at eight-twelve.

Into the gaudy evening of Hollywood. Rows of lights, rows of palms, rows of show windows—slow, interminable, shifting rows of cars—music of loudspeakers, din of newsboys, ringing bells and grinding brakes at the stoplights. What an enormous place this was, with its myriad houses! It takes a rumour five minutes to speed from one end of Hollywood to the other. But it takes a car more than an hour.

Meyer tooted his horn wildly. The cars swerved aside in alarm to let him pass. Floodlights—banners. What a fever this town was in! Its street lamps always blazed too brightly —it hung out flags and lights, it rent the air—for no reason under the sun. The howl of sirens! One of the daily forest fires on the surrounding hills. Meyer had to let the fire engines pass. "Go ahead, go ahead, go ahead," implored Donka.

Pico Boulevard was a roundabout. Wilshire Boulevard was packed with cars, and the traffic was jammed. "Go by way of the little drives, and then along Third Street," said Donka. She had removed the heavy tiara and, hands clasped round its spikes, was sitting beside the chauffeur, bent forward like a runner. A row of swaying red lanterns blocked the whole width of Ogden Drive. A house was being transported—a bungalow—neatly arranged on two cars, followed by another bearing two huge old olive trees with roots and trunk and foliage—house and garden on the move. They could not get by. Turn round. A mad place. Costumed people. Costumed streets. Cowboys, Cossacks, hermits, Malays, Spanish, English, Mexican, Chinese, Egyptian faces. Street cars, crossings. Vendors. Roses, lady! Peanuts, peanuts! *Pictorial Review*, lady! Latest number! The stop signals rang. Obstructions, obstructions everywhere.

Meyer was a good driver, but nervous. He had a sick wife, God help us, and never got enough sleep at night.

" Can't you drive faster, Meyer? "

" No, madame—sorry."

Donka swore in Rumanian. Eight thirty-six—and they had not even reached the point where Hollywood melts imperceptibly into the more bustling streets of Los Angeles.

" Will we catch the train? "

" No," said Meyer, stopping the car for a moment. " Impossible, madame."

They had stopped on the corner of Western Avenue. The red stoplight was on. Everything was blank, unmitigated hopelessness. Oliver was going away.

By the time the green lights had flashed on, Donka had reached her decision.

" Drive up Western Avenue to Pasadena. It takes half an hour for the train to get there. We can catch up with it."

Meyer threw her a sidelong glance. She looked positively insane, sitting there in her costume and make-up, wanting to chase after an express train. She probably was insane. Most of the people in Hollywood were insane after one fashion or another. Her lips moved—her hands were clasped round the tiara. Maybe she was praying. Meyer, the chauffeur—the one-time engineer—felt a vast contempt for Donka, the play actress. The car leaped forward under his hand, tearing furiously round the curves that led uphill.

Donka's thoughts during that drive did not cover much ground. They were, in fact, as monotonous as the prayers murmured over a rosary. Oliver, Oliver, Oliver. I've got to see you again, Oliver. You can't go away, Oliver. She was having difficulty even now in conjuring up his image whole. She could see only fragments of him—a laugh, a gesture, a childish, inconsequential word. She could see him stooping to pick one of the lake-red anemones that grow in Rhodes—bent forward to flick a little dust from his knees with his riding-crop—moving a chair into place—tapping a cigarette on the table-top three times before lighting it—mounting a staircase, putting on a cap, gazing seriously at his reflection in a shaving mirror. His shoulders were the most beautiful thing about him—and his slender finger-nails—and his knees. They were exactly like the knees of a bronze statue. Sometimes he would heave a deep sigh for no reason at all. He had monograms worked in silk on the breast pockets of his pyjamas.

What else did she know about him—what else? His prettiest tie was the one with the pale grey spots. He loved his battered old suitcase. He hated stiff collars. His hair smelt

of camellias. He believed in God—not very much, but a little. He wore a ring with little chip diamonds. A ring bequeathed him by his mother, which never left his finger. What else, what else? Is that all I remember of you, and you're leaving me already? Oliver—child—my God!—and you're on your way this very minute?

The car was suddenly odorous with the scent of ripening oranges. They were speeding madly past the fruit plantations beyond the town. Los Angeles lay far below. The road leaped, curving, from hill to hill.

"Shall we make it, Meyer?"

"Maybe."

"How many more miles?"

A shrug of the shoulders.

She reached into the side pocket, lighted a cigarette, puffed at it and thrust it into the chauffeur's mouth. He drew the smoke deep into his lungs, gratefully. He even smiled a little.

"Faster—faster—faster——"

The car shot forward. The air struck and hummed against the windshield. The horn shrieked.

"Good, Meyer. Good—good—good——"

Signposts, houses, streets.

"Faster—faster——"

White boards at the corners that said: "Stop!" Meyer stopped.

"Don't stop, Meyer. Drive past."

"I can't."

"You must."

"I won't."

"Then get away from the wheel."

This was Pasadena. Donka was crowding the chauffeur from his seat. It took a few moments to effect the exchange. Her hands were prickling. The wheel felt hot from the pressure of Meyer's fingers. She gripped it tight and stepped on the gas. Citizens, taking their evening stroll past the show windows and movie houses of Pasadena's Broadway, were startled to see a car, its horn shrieking, come tearing down the street, shoot past the stop signal and across the boulevard. Traffic was disorganised, pedestrians ran, a policeman bellowed. Then all that remained was the impression of a weirdly glittering woman in a car running wild.

The tiny station with its white arc-lights, and the pepper trees planted trimly along its gravelled platform. Donka's knees were shaking as she sprang from the car. "Has the

Chief gone through?" she asked a man who was tossing luggage into a handcart.

"Coming through in one minute," he replied, too startled and too well mannered to stare at Donka. It was not till she had turned her back that he stopped to size the phenomenon up. A bareheaded woman, painted like a yellow ghost and dressed like a queen, on the Pasadena railway platform at night. He finally came to the conclusion that maybe they were going to shoot a film here. The few others gathered on the platform were engaged in similar speculations.

Meyer, stiff-legged, brought her cloak from the car and threw it over her shoulders. He was furious with Donka, but he was a little sorry for her, too. She stood there, staring up the track and smiling like a person drugged. It was obvious that she had completely forgotten what she looked like.

After that frantic drive, a minute's wait seemed very long—there were the signals—then two lights coming down the track, looming larger and larger—the chugging of the engine—movement on the all but deserted platform—an official, sauntering out—two men with mail bags—the towering engine—the train—a long train with far too many cars, speeding into the station and looking for a few seconds as though it were not going to stop there at all. Donka's heart went crazy during those seconds. The thick hour hand of the station clock moved from nine fourteen to nine fifteen. And the train came to a halt.

Donka gathered up her cloak and gown and passed swiftly along the cars in search of Oliver. He was nowhere to be seen. My God, he was nowhere to be seen—he was keeping himself under cover somewhere and the train would go on, away into the darkness, and everything would be over.

Suddenly her heart stopped—then started again—more slowly, more freely, more easily. There was Oliver.

He was standing on the running-board of one of the cars, his little white dog under his arm. He was wearing his light brown lounge suit—the one he had worn on the steamer—and the tie with the pale grey spots. He looked emaciated—two furrows showed in his cheeks when he smiled. He was smiling because he was talking to the black porter and because he was Oliver Dent. He was wearing gloves, but no hat. Donka perceived every detail clearly—as one sees pictures through a magnifying glass or images thrown on a screen, but rarely the things of everyday life.

"Oliver," she said tentatively.

Without a second's hesitation he stepped from the running-board and was at her side.

"You?" he said, and was at her side. He was here. He was standing beside her. She smiled. He was smiling, too, very gravely.

"Did you get my wire?"

"Yes."

"Do you understand? Do you believe me?"

"Oh, yes."

"And you're going to Europe?"

"Yes. I must."

"Must you?"

"Yes."

"Can't you stay here?"

"No. Can't you go along?"

"No."

Tobias whimpered softly.

"How long does the train stop here?" Donka asked the man, who was passing with his empty handcart.

"Going in a moment," he replied, and waited curiously. He had not recognised Donka. She was *passée*. But he did recognise Oliver Dent.

"You're made up?" said Oliver wonderingly.

"Yes. I've just come from the studio. I had to see you again."

"Yes, I know. You're good. It's too bad about us."

That sounded final. Donka put out her hands, as though to war off a blow. No, no, no, she was crying to herself.

"Let the train go," she said. "Stay here."

"I can't. I'm a wreck. I need Europe."

"Let the train go," she said, "and stay here one night. For good-bye," she said. And then she said no more. She merely *willed*. Donka Morescu was a heroine. She had no religion. She only knew that you could get from life anything you *willed* to get. *Willing* was harder and sterner, more exacting, more self-denying, more potent than *doing*.

"For good-bye?" said Oliver slowly. "Where could we go?"

"Anywhere. To your place, to mine, to an hotel."

"I mustn't miss my ship."

"You can take a plane to-morrow morning. You'll catch up with the train by night."

The wan lights of the platform, the plumed shadows of the pepper trees, the smell of steam from the locomotive, the

oppressive atmosphere of partings—the atmosphere of railway stations the world over.

"All aboard!" called the black man in the white jacket.

God knows what waves, what rays and vibrations emanate from people like Donka—people who take rapaciously, who give lavishly. Oliver glanced from Donka to the car and back to Donka. The doors at the rear of the train were already being closed.

"Can Meyer get my hand baggage out in a hurry?" he asked. He set Tobias down. The dog looked utterly bewildered and clung close to his master's legs. Donka's cloak failed to conceal her gown entirely. The embroidered splendour of the Russian court ball was exposed at various points, and eyes were staring at her from every car window. Oliver placed his hand under her arm in that protective little gesture with which she had first fallen in love. He was holding her arm. He was at her side. He was staying with her. The train was moving away and Oliver was staying. He was walking beside her toward the car that was waiting behind the station. With a curiously jubilant sense of dismay he perceived that something from which he had already been in flight had him firmly in its grip once more.

"It's the last night," he thought. Even now he could taste its flavour on his tongue. It tasted a little too sweet and a little bitter—like a piece of over-ripe fruit.

Shortly before seven next morning a young man in a light brown lounge suit appeared at the Glendale airport near Pasadena with a request for a small private plane to overtake the *Chief*, which had passed through Pasadena the night before. It was no unusual request. There were plenty of people who shortened the eighty-four-hour trip between Los Angeles and New York by flying during the day and taking the train at night, thereby cutting the travelling time to a mere thirty-six hours and escaping the desert heat. Since the regular plane had already left, the young man insisted on chartering one of the small private sports planes kept in readiness for such purposes.

It was a fine morning, with a light breeze from the west and a few delicately curling clouds at the zenith of the pale blue sky. The young man gazed upward and drew a long breath. The queer-looking white dog he had on leash seemed dispirited. A porter from the Pasadena Hotel brought up a battered, widely travelled suitcase. Man, dog, and bag were weighed.

A young pilot named Cross had his machine rolled out—a small plane with a red fuselage.

"Funny little box," commented the passenger, circling the plane before he stepped in. "Not brand new, is it?"

"First class, though, sir. Sags a little to the left, maybe, but flies straight as a die otherwise. And it's never cracked up—never once."

"Oldish Fokker with a Wright motor, isn't it?"

"Right. You fly yourself?"

"No. Can't call it flying. I took my pilot's test once. I can fly round in the air a little, but I can't land—you know."

"Mhm——" The pilot nodded comprehendingly. "Just the same, you look familiar to me somehow. In the films, aren't you?"

"Maybe," rejoined the passenger, and his mood seemed to darken. "Where's our first landing-place?"

"Let's see," said the pilot, strapping himself into his flying-kit. "We could lunch in Winslow."

The passenger took the dog under his arm, climbed into the diminutive cabin, sniffed the smell of oil and gas, was promptly deafened by the din of the take-off, and leaned back contentedly as the machine rose from the ground.

"Don't be frightened, Tobias," he said. "No one can do a thing to us here."

Tobias could not bring himself to share his master's good spirits. He had spent an abominable night in a horrible room—a hotel room, as they called a place that smelled as though a thousand people had lived in it before him, slept and eaten in it, rejoiced and fretted in it—sheer torture to a dog with any kind of nose or breeding. He had been forced, moreover, to share the room with an ill-tempered individual called Meyer, who wore hard leather tubes instead of trousers on his nether extremities. It was not merely that you could not bite into leather putties—worse, if you dared so much as utter the faintest whimper, they would come flying through the air to crack a small, sorrowful dog over the head.

"It's all right, Tobias," said master, patting the dog's back and letting his hand sink into the warm white coat. It was a cool hand, shaking ever so slightly. Tobias sat with his ears pricked up, as though he were listening to something very far away. "It's all right, Tobias," said master. "They'll leave us alone now."

Master was asleep. The dog sat, vigilant and taut. He had been accorded the tremendous honour of travelling with

master. Master had been entrusted to his care, and he intended to watch over him. Whatever terrible things might happen—things far worse than being stuck into a box while the world fell away and vanished below amid an ear-splitting racket—he was not going to let anything harm master. Master was greatly changed : his coat was wrinkled, and his hair did not gleam as it should, Perspiration beaded his forehead, and he seemed to be labouring under a tremendous strain, even while he slept. He woke with a start, as the plane suddenly dipped and soared again.

The pilot smiled in through the little window. The passenger smiled back—with something of an effort. It was devilishly hot in the cabin. They were flying over the desert—a charming little desert with hillocks and cars no bigger than flies. The air was dense, and the machine sailed smoothly along, falling only infrequently into a treacherous air pocket. There was no reason why the passenger should be taken ill.

Yet the passenger was taken ill—desperately ill, the moment he awoke from his nap of an hour or so. Or, to put it more accurately, it was the illness that dragged him from his slumbers—an illness with which he was already familiar.

He had gone through all this once before—two days ago —on the staircase under the picture of Saint Sebastian. Here it was again—the purple and the luminous blackness—the explosive heat—the choking and the cold sweat—the trembling and the shuddering—the lamentable state of utter weakness that followed. And right on its heels, the whole thing all over again from the very beginning. Dear God ! I feel so sick, Tobias. There it comes again. Dear God ! Dear God !

The world below was small and very tidy. The pilot knew his business. He would turn in his seat occasionally, and whenever he turned, there was his passenger doubled up, hands over his face, retching. The pilot smiled. Pilot's test ! Pure bluff ! Just for the fun of the thing he made a sideslip. He had no use for braggarts. How horrified the little dog looked !

What was Tobias to do—what in the name of heaven was he to do, with master sick and imploring him to help?—and he could not help. " Tobias, help me. Oh, God ! I can't stand this," groaned master. " Help me, Tobias—help me, why don't you? Donka—help me—help me, please, Donka."

At the sound of that other name, Tobias set off to get Donka to come and help. But the box in which they were flying was shut tight. They had been locked in—they could not get out—

he and master. Tobias scratched at the walls, licked the master's hands, howled and barked and whined. Nothing happened—they were prisoners. The pilot looked in and stopped smiling. The gentleman was acting strangely. He was pulling his coat off—tearing his shirt open—he seemed to be suffocating. Sweat was pouring down his yellow face, gathering at the tip of his chin and hanging there, one huge drop after another. It looked ugly. The handsome gentleman looked ugly.

The pilot felt a twinge of compassion and stopped playing little pranks with the plane. He would have been glad enough to fly smoothly now and give the poor devil in the cabin a chance to recover. But a dusty wind had just spring up from the east, swirling little eddies of sand before it, and above and below, and no matter what altitude he tried, the air was bumpy.

At the second and third attacks, you felt you might just as well give up and die, burn up and perish on the spot. There was a gnawing pain at the core of your being—hidden but gnawing—that kept bringing the whole thing on again. "Oh, my God, Tobias, I can't stand this—do something, will you?"

But when it stopped—stopped and started again and went on—seizure after seizure—choking, perspiration, pain, terror, chill—for two hours, three hours—then you discovered that you were tough. You submitted. You resigned yourself. You ceased to be a human being—you became an object that was being tortured and could not defend itself. Everything grew tired. Your heart grew tired. Finally the pain itself grew tired.

"We should have brought some brandy along," the passenger told his dog. He was dressing himself again, mopping the sweat from his face. His handkerchief was wringing wet, and he threw it on the floor of the plane. His hands were trembling so violently as to produce the effect of a spasm, an ungovernable chill. Tobias stretched himself across master's lap. He pressed his body against master's body. Maybe that would help a little.

"It's all right, Tobias," said master feebly. The plane glided gently, silently downward.

By the time they had landed and the door had been opened and the air was streaming in—the hot air of the little desert town of Winslow—by the time the pilot stuck his head in, Oliver was smiling again. He drew himself up from his seat and clambered out of the plane, swaying a little. Then he

was out on the flying-field, blinking at the sun, his knees feeling as though they were made of rubber.

"Knock you out a little?" asked the pilot indulgently. "Airsick?"

"God knows. I don't think so. Must have got hold of some bad stuff somewhere."

They crossed the level runway, the noonday sun hot on their heads.

"Get a bite and you'll feel better. The lunch-room's over there," said the pilot, turning on his heel. "We can start again in twenty minutes."

The dog led his master on leash to the lunch-room. He gazed entreatingly at the waiter, with the vague idea that here was a person who might help. The waiter brought him a bowl of food and master a glass of tomato juice. Master drank the cold red liquid, then dropped his hands to his side while a look of astonishment crossed his face. The pilot came over to the small bare table. The windows were hung with yellow-red Spanish curtains. Two mechanics at the counter were shooting dice. The whir of a landing plane sounded outside, and someone ran past the door, shouting something.

"Well, how goes it?" asked the pilot. "Can we get off again soon?"

The passenger's spent, yellow face flushed with humiliation. "No," he replied. "I think you'd better go back to Pasadena. I'll take a train."

"Oh—sure—if you say so. Weren't you in a hurry?"

"Yes. I wanted to catch Tuesday's steamer."

"You won't get to New York by Tuesday unless you fly."

"No. I know I won't."

The pilot eyed his passenger, sitting there with head bowed and hands drooping. The dog sat beside him with the jealous, suspicious, uneasy regard of a harem attendant.

"All right, then," said the pilot. "I'll have your baggage brought over."

"Yes," said the passenger. "Please." As the pilot turned to go, he spoke again. "It wasn't airsickness. It was something hellish. I simply can't go through it again. Horrible feeling—when you've got to give up."

"Well," the pilot comforted him, "we've all got to give up some time or other in life. Happens to everyone. Don't let it bother you. Those things just happen. By the way—would you—er—I wonder if you'd do me a great favour, Mr. Dent? Souvenir of our flight together. Cross is my name—

the little woman at home would be so tickled if I could bring her your autograph. It's a shame you had to give up."

The passenger, his lips parted to reply, paused in thought. Then a smile touched the corners of his mouth.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Cross," he said. "You've got it wrong. I'm not Dent—though I'm sometimes mistaken for him. No, I'm not Dent. I'll wager Oliver Dent wouldn't have given up."

"Oh—I see—my mistake—I thought—I'm sorry. . . . Well, I'll be getting along then. Pleasant trip the rest of the way."

The passenger remained seated for a while beside his shabby pigskin bag with all its faded labels.

"Well, Tobias," he remarked at length, "we won't get to Europe this time."

Dr. Bratt of Winslow had an excellent practice and a large gold-lettered sign outside the windows of his consulting-room. He was of German extraction—a man with a paunch and spectacles and a bald spot. The four chairs in his waiting-room were always occupied, and the last two years' issues of the *Saturday Evening Post* on his table were well thumbed. His doctor's diploma—a masterpiece of calligraphic art—hung in his consulting-room together with a picture of the ruins of Heidelberg Castle and the photograph of an old-fashioned lady with long, flowing tresses and a voluptuous, unwedded, almost equivocal look about her. A girl in bronzed cast-iron, feeding some small cast-iron doves, stood on the desk.

"Well, where's the trouble?" Dr. Bratt inquired of the new patient, pulling down his lower lids as a matter of routine. Dr. Bratt belonged to the generation of doctors who held anæmia accountable for a host of this world's ills.

"I don't know exactly," the patient replied. "Stomach, I think." He was a tall young man—a stranger to the place—who looked rather ill and had brought along a dusty little dog on a leash.

"I must apologise for bringing the dog along. I'm just passing through, and didn't want to leave him at the hotel alone. He hasn't much sense."

Tobias seated himself quietly on his short tail—the truth of the matter being that he was the sensible one of the two, and had refused to allow his sick master to go out without him.

"I see, I see. Nice dog. Well, well, well—so it's the stomach, is it? What's your name? Age?"

The patient gave his name as Edward O. Drake. Age, 26. These details were entered in the records. Then the patient described his symptoms.

Dr. Bratt listened. He rubbed the corners of his mouth with forefinger and thumb. He tapped his fountain pen against the breast of the cast-iron girl. He drew little top hats on a sheet of paper—any number of shiny little top hats.

"So all this happened in the plane, did it? Well, of course, that sort of thing might very easily happen in a plane. It needn't mean that you're sick. Mrs. Bratt, for example—my wife—couldn't fly if you gave her a thousand dollars. Any pain? Here?—in the appendix region? What? Ah—your appendix is gone? Congratulations. In that case, you're worth five hundred dollars more. What kind of pain? Something like heartburn? Sharper? Well, you've probably never had real heartburn. And when was the first attack? Two days ago? You hadn't flown that time? Out of a clear sky, was it? Ah! You'd been drinking in Mexico—to be sure. They've got nothing to worry about in Mexico—as much beer as they want. And a motor crash into the bargain. Well, that might easily result in some pressure on the stomach—nerves, you know. Take your clothes off, my boy."

"Good, good." It was a respectful tribute, proffered with a slight bow, to the torso his patient was exposing. "Good set of muscles. Plenty of exercise, eh? Play golf? I can still go round in ninety-four, myself—not always, you understand—but I can manage a ninety-four now and then. When I'm at my best. Well, where's the pain? There? Here? Not there, either? Lord, man, surely you know where it hurts? All right—dress yourself."

"Good muscles," said the doctor, eyeing the shoulders which were once more disappearing into the soft sports shirt. "The muscles are excellent. But the young man's a little undernourished. Are you by any chance one of these fools who diet?"

"Not very strenuously."

"Now we're getting down to brass tacks. What've you eaten to-day, for instance?"

"A glass of grapefruit juice this morning."

"And then?"

"Then I had this attack."

"Mhm. I see, I see, I see. And for lunch?"

"Tomato juice."

"And then?"

"That's all I could take. I was in pain."

"Pain—I see. Well, my boy, you've got a little acidity, and that's all you've got—fashionable disease—comes from eating the wrong kind of food. Buy yourself some charcoal tablets and take a few—then go home and have your wife broil you a good steak. Tell her with old Doc Bratt's compliments that a man should have ham and eggs for breakfast and not sour fruit juices. No, my dear fellow, you'll never make a poor doctor rich. You're a healthy man."

"For a healthy man, I feel pretty rotten."

"Just eat your steak. Take your charcoal. Here—I'll write it down for you. Have you ever had any real illness?"

"Just the usual thing. And the appendix operation. Oh, yes—and when I was a child I managed to get bilharzia."

"Bilharzia. Hear, hear! And what may bilharzia be?"

"A kind of worm that flourishes along the Nile—very disagreeable—attacks all the natives. My nurse must have been looking the other way."

"That's interesting. What were you doing on the Nile as a baby?"

"My father was in Egypt—in Government service. I'm an Englishman."

"That's obvious from your speech. Aren't you?—wait a second." The doctor turned a speculative gaze on his patient, who was folding the prescription into his wallet and reaching for the dog's leash. "No," he concluded, casting a glance over his spectacles at the case history card—"no, you're not. I thought for a moment you were that film fellow—Oliver Dent. We had one of his pictures at our movie house not long ago. But he doesn't really look anything like you. Well—eat your steaks, then. And a pleasant journey."

Man and dog departed. A healthy man. No pain. No—not now. Only the vague feeling that it might recur. Winslow was hot and dead and dusty. It was growing dark—the shop windows were lighted. They bought charcoal at a drug store—three boxes of it. Then they went to the hotel—a commercial hotel near the station. The lobby was full of men in armchairs.

Oliver stood at the mirror in his room for a long time, gazing at his reflection and wondering how it happened that he did not look anything like himself. It was true. He did look different. His name was different, too. Edward O. Drake. Edward Drake was free to look ill, free to be airsick, free to make a fool of himself, to suffer pain, to live in a third-rate hotel, to find surcease from reporters, women, and publicity.

He had metamorphosed himself once before. Edward Drake, the Oxford student, the diplomat's son, had been transformed into Oliver Dent, the film actor, the handsomest man in the world, the poster with the radiant smile. There was a subtle pleasure in changing himself back again, in running away from himself, in causing Oliver Dent to vanish from the face of the earth. Till the next film started. Yes, I know—peace be unto us—only till the next film starts.

"Quiet," he said to Tobias. "We're going to Clearwater. We're going to fish for trout—so big."

He looked at his tongue in the mirror: the charcoal tablets had turned it coal black. He felt well. No pain. A little uneasiness.

"Yes, come along, Tobias—you can sleep with me."

He lay in bed, his eyes closed, the dog warm against his outstretched feet. He felt the charcoal making his stomach soft and velvety. Black velvet. Nice. Pleasant. Like a cuttlefish. Lots of cuttlefish. All black inside. There were cuttlefish in Rhodes. Longing for Donka? Yes. Still longing for Donka. Good-night, Donka. Lots of silvery, silvery, jumping trout. A healthy man. No pain at all. Nothing but black velvet.

On Tuesday a young man, accompanied by a very dirty but cheerful little dog, arrived at Clearwater Inn and asked for a room with a bath. He had come by bus—the bus that leaves Seattle at twelve-thirty. It was still light on that midsummer day when the bus arrived at Clearwater Inn. But the sun had dropped behind the mountains, and more than half the lake lay deep in shadow.

Clearwater Inn boasted only two rooms with a bath, and they were already taken. But there was another room on the first floor, which was only two doors from the bathroom. A comely young woman in a flowered cretonne dress, her brown arms and legs bare, took the visitor up. The room contained a bed, a chair, and a table. The clothes closet stood open, and the walls smelt of fresh paint. A red-and-white woven Indian rug lay on the floor, and the large window faced south. You could see a segment of the lake and the soaring line of the mountain on the farther shore. The mountain was nothing but a blue-and-purple mass since the sun had dropped behind it and stained the sky a pale yellow—the delicious pale yellow of lemon rind. The vegetable garden, redolent of cucumbers and greens, lay beneath the window, and two small grey squirrels were playing among the huge leaves of a pumpkin

patch. Some shirts, hung on a line to dry, waved their arms gently, as a light breeze from the mountains struck them. A path leading from the garden followed the lake for a little distance, then clambered uphill and was lost to sight in the woods beyond. The strong, rather bitter odour of resin rose from some woodstacks piled neatly beside the road. Three children—a girl of five and two older boys who looked like twins—were dangling their legs over the side of a little wooden boat-landing. They were very quiet, presumably because of the fishing-line one of the boys had dropped into the water. Tiny waves broke with a barely audible gurgle against the supports of the landing and a red boat moored to it. Presently three long-necked wild ducks came sailing by in triangular formation to sweep in supple flight over the lake. Someone who had been sawing wood stopped. The silence deepened.

The young man turned from the window. A Bible lay on the bureau of light-hued wood, beside a pitcher of water and a blue glass. The water seemed cold and fresh, for though the pitcher contained no ice, it was dim with moisture. The guest poured some water into the glass and drank it.

"Are you thirsty, too, Tobias?" he asked his dog. Immediately on entering the room the dog had plumped himself down before the newly whitewashed wall, to watch in a state of quivering excitement the antics of a tiny green spider that was racing up and down, up and down. Meantime, he had been busily engaged in scratching at a sooty ear with his hind paw, but he stopped politely when his master addressed him and, paw in ear, wagged a gentle affirmative.

"I'd like to stay here for a while for the fishing," the young man said. "I've brought my tackle along from Seattle. It's down in the hall. How about the fishing regulations? I don't want to fish in the lake, but farther upstream, for trout."

"Mr. Colmore can tell you all about that. He always sees to these things for our guests."

"Is Mr. Colmore the proprietor?"

"Yes. He's my husband."

"Thank you, Mrs. Colmore. If my dog could have some water? And my luggage is still downstairs. It's very quiet here."

"Yes, it's a little lonely. You get used to it, though, after you've been here a while. And then, of course, there's always the radio."

"Yes, of course," said the young man. When she had gone, he seated himself in the armchair and stretched out his

legs. He was watching the spider now, too—a fascinating little green spider. Presently his head moved lazily round toward the window, where the mountain was turning dark blue, then black, against a sky deepening to raspberry red. A few vivid little clouds came scurrying along behind the ridge, as though they were in a great hurry. So clear was the air that he could hear the voices of the children on the boat-landing. His mind was a blank—conscious of the stillness and of nothing else.

At seven the guest appeared at the desk, his wet hair brushed smoothly back. The dog was wet, too, and a trifle cleaner. The young man registered as Edward O. Drake, born in Athens, a native of England, coming from Los Angeles, travelling at the moment, and with no permanent address. Mr. Colmore, the young proprietor, looked like a Frenchman—probably from Canada.

"You want to fish upstream, Mr. Drake?"

"Yes. I've heard it's best up around the Four Brothers."

"Yes, it's good up there—if you don't want anything but trout. Otherwise the lake fishing's good, too. It's pretty far to the Four Brothers. Two hours' walk—you can't get there by car."

"That doesn't matter."

"You'd better make an early start. My boy can go with you. Or do you know these parts?"

"I was here once before—on business. But I couldn't stay. I decided then I'd come back some day."

"Good for the nerves here, sir," said the proprietor, with a brief glance at his guest's face. "Is there anything else you'll need? Is your tackle in order?"

"I think so. Only I'm afraid the flies aren't much good. I couldn't get what I wanted in Seattle." He drew the fly-book from his breast pocket and peered into it anxiously before turning it over to his host.

"It's a long time since I've done any fishing," he said, gazing disconsolately at the flies, which were crudely made and too large.

The house smelt of hot butter and broiling fish. Three stuffed creatures hung on the whitewashed walls: a wild-cat, a racoon, and a large, long-legged bird with which Drake was not familiar. Tobias, who clung close to his master, was wondering about the bird, too. A bell sounded a crystal note.

"There," said the proprietor. "Mrs. Colmore has dinner ready."

Two lighted candles adorned each of the four tables of waxed oak in the dining-room. The effect was charming, and preserved the atmosphere of shining tranquillity that brooded over Clearwater Inn. One of the tables had not been set. Mr. and Mrs. Colmore with their three children were seated at another, while Drake sat alone, with Tobias at his feet. Two gentlemen, entering a little belatedly with murmured apologies, took possession of the fourth table. They were wearing sweaters, and the younger, to judge from the greased and peeling skin of his face, was suffering from a bad case of sunburn. They bowed an informal greeting to Drake as they seated themselves.

He was introduced to them after the meal. The elder—tall and thin, with a homely, intelligent face—was a Mr. Smith of Chicago—a manufacturer of paper, if Drake understood him correctly. The name of the younger was Clyde—an unassuming person, rather helpless under the flick of Smith's teasing. It transpired later that he was *the* Clyde—one of America's four greatest authors.

The conversation dealt exclusively with fishing, which was as it should be—a purely masculine conversation of the most satisfactory kind. Drake displayed his flies again—it was a matter that seemed to be giving him serious concern. Smith, calling on Mr. Colmore to bear him out, asserted that he had caught an eleven-inch trout the year before, right at the mouth of the stream, with nothing but a miserable metal lure. Clyde never fished anywhere but in the lake, with worms and a slip-knotted line, cheerfully indifferent as to whether he caught trout or perch. Smith laughed him to scorn. Drake plied them with questions about the Four Brothers and the best place for fishing in the mountains.

Clyde ordered something that he called "buttermilk," which turned out to be mint juleps. The tall glasses were dimmed with moisture. Cubes of ice floated about in the whisky, and a chill fragrance rose from the fresh green mint leaves that sparkled with bubbles. Drake drained the first glass quickly—the second slowly, and with extraordinary relish. He was haunted by the fear of that metallic taste, which had lingered in his mouth for days. It was gone now. After the third glass, they all went outside to take a look at the weather.

Four chairs stood on the veranda, which was supported by four round wooden columns and ran along the front of the house. They were greeted as they emerged by a gentle,

monotonous patter beating on the veranda roof, and the bushes surrounding the house. Heads flung back, they squinted skyward. Tobias, born and reared in Hollywood, where there was no such thing as weather, wondered what it was all about.

"Congratulations," said Clyde. "Rain."

"Never mind," Smith consoled him. "It'll rain all night and be over by morning."

Mr. Colmore stepped out into the rain, walked as far as the corner of the house and returned.

"It's only a cloud," he said. "You can see the stars over there."

The two gentlemen re-entered the house. Drake walked down the three veranda steps and out into the rain. You could see the drops falling past the lighted window, close-threaded as the beaded strings of a Chinese curtain hung athwart the darkness. Tobias had followed him—timorously at first, keeping one forepaw tentatively raised for a second before venturing on the next step. But once the raindrops had soaked through his coat to the blue-black skin he greeted the cool, quick tingle with an outburst of glee, snapping at the thing that was coming down from up there. It was a wonderful world and smelt thrillingly of wet mice.

"They rise well after the rain," Mr. Colmore observed.

"Before the rain, I thought."

"Before *and* after," smiled Mr. Colmore.

Drake drew his hand over his wet head and opened his mouth, gulping down the warm dampness of the fresh air. Everything was rustling.

"Rain's glorious," he said. "Glorious."

"Do you come from Mexico?" his host inquired.

"No. From Los Angeles. Why?"

"Well, it's dry enough there too. Petrol instead of air all along the south-west coast. Regular chunks of it. A man doesn't appreciate rain till he's been without it a long time."

"Yes, you're right there."

"I was in Mexico once, Mr. Drake. Nine months without a drop of rain. Nothing but cactus and malaria. Sort of low fever the whole time, and your ears buzzing with quinine. Well, and then I got back to Chicago, and as I walked out of the station it was raining. Everything wet—the streets dirty—dirty kind of rain too—and the woman with rubbers and umbrellas. Lord, I stood there grinning all over my face, breathing and swallowing. I've never been so happy in my life as I was standing there under that dirty Middle Western

rain outside the Chicago railway station. You don't have to tell me. I know what rain means to a man who comes from a dry place. Los Angeles *is* pretty dry, isn't it?"

"Yes. You don't notice it so much when you're there. It's very dry."

"Well—I'll say good night then, Mr. Drake. You're bound to sleep well."

"I hope so."

"I'll guarantee it. All our guests sleep well. They all come here looking as worn out as you do, Mr. Drake, but you wouldn't recognise them after a few days. Everyone ought to take time off from business once in a while, don't you think so? Well—good night to you. I hope the rooster won't disturb you. The old one has some sense, but we've got a young fellow that starts a racket every morning before the sun comes up—three-thirty or thereabouts."

The rain fell murmuring into the lake—the bedclothes were cool and a little damp, warming up gradually as his body grew warmer. Drake slept well till the young rooster crowed. Then he got up and went to the window. The sun rose, and the mountain top, standing clear against the sky, caught its rays first. A fat white cloud floated below, and the lake was covered by mists which thinned and lifted, so that you could see the fish leaping from the water here and there, leaving silvery rings on the slate-coloured surface. A butterfly was asleep on the window-sill, looking like a tiny sailboat with its folded quivering wings. Drake went back to bed and fell asleep again.

Georgie Colmore, one of the twins—a man of nine in canvas knickers and big boots, and an expert in all matters pertaining to the sport of angling—presented himself at seven. Drake, who had been busily growing a moustache for three days, decided he could get along without a shave. His morning shower too was a summary affair. Clad like George, in canvas knickers, with a sweater pulled over his shirt, he was savouring to the full the malicious masculine delight of going about in old clothes. Two crammed wardrobe trunks that had not been called for were standing somewhere within the vast confines of the Grand Central Station in New York. The *Europa* was tossing on the open sea, and in Cabin 256—left unoccupied—flowers and letters and telegrams waited in vain for a claimant.

"I've got to send word to Jerry," thought Drake fleetingly, but he brushed the thought aside. And by the time they were on their way to the Four Brothers he had forgotten it.

The road to the Four Brothers—a pebbly road, glinting and shimmering with tiny specks of mica—ran uphill all the way, following the edge of the forest first, then turning into the forest over a small wooden bridge. The trees were mostly cedars—tall and beautiful—not very thickly planted, but with spreading boughs, and the ground was covered with ferns and other large, supple, serrated leaves. The slopes on either side of the road were still hung with dewy spider webs and overgrown with blueberries and reddish-yellow toadstools that smelt delectably of damp earth. Little grey squirrels skipped across the path and up the tree-trunks to perch among the branches whence, motionless and erect, their tiny forepaws joined, they gazed down at the procession. Tobias, who took the lead though he did not know the way, was going into wild ecstasies of joy—now scurrying away with a preoccupied air as though he had just received a telegram, now retracing his steps, his nose deep in some trail. He snapped at the dragonflies humming by on their blue propellers, sure evidence of the stream's proximity. He lagged behind, digging at the earth with all four paws, his face furious as that of some Chinese mask. He popped up again, the image of decorum except for one ear enterprisingly laid back, and followed his master, nuzzling his leg—ostentatiously well-behaved, according to the precepts of his early youth. This was far and away the happiest day the jealous, slighted Tobias had ever known. He was with master—he and not Pluck—and master was happy. He rolled his eyes, to cast an anxious glance into the beloved face—yes, master was happy.

The stream on which they emerged dropped sharply from ledge to ledge. The current was swift, and the grey-green water, transparent only where it ran quiet and deep, looked very cold. Stones and bleached tree-trunks were embedded in the river bottom, with little islands of white sand that glittered in the sunlight. George, armed with the fishing-bag, was singing lustily, but his voice was drowned by the water's roar. Drake was carrying the jointed rod in a canvas case and finding it rather cumbersome. They rested twice, quenched their thirst at a walled spring, and rested a third time, just before undertaking the steep ascent to the Four Brothers.

The Four Brothers were four small waterfalls—really nothing more than cascades—that took the stream leaping over four smoothly polished declivities in the river bed. The never-ending impact of the water had hollowed out a little trough under each cascade, into which the foaming water dashed, to

lie dark and quiet for a moment before continuing on its course to the next fall. The air was pricked with a cool, moss-scented spray, and the sun's rays struck the second of the Four Brothers at an angle that set it shimmering with all the colours of the rainbow. When Drake saw the first trout gleam, leap, and shoot down the waterfall, a shout of joy escaped him—then, like a true fisherman, he fell silent and started fitting his rod together. George had stopped singing, and Tobias had assumed his waiting attitude—flat on his stomach, his hind legs outstretched.

Drake caught a large very fine trout, to begin with, and then, for a long time, nothing. His hand had quickly rediscovered the knack of casting, but his flies were poor. George thought so too, and indulged in dreams of making some flies for the visitor himself. He had dug up a few worms, to be on the safe side, and brought them along in a perforated tin can, filled with earth, where the glossy, springy, pearl-grey creatures curled lazily round each other. But Drake would have none of them. Tobias yawned presently and fell asleep. They descended to the first fall, then lower still, where the stream formed a loop and the green water was flecked with white foam.

There Drake caught his second trout, which fought fiercely. For a moment, he thought it was going to get away, but he managed to land it. It was a large, exquisitely beautiful fish, its back green and silver like the water, its slender flanks lighter and speckled with gold. The eyes were ringed by a triple circle of silver and gold and black. Drake marvelled at the clarity of his vision. He had fished for trout often during his Oxford vacations, and always with the same flooding sense of joy that pulsed through his veins now, yet he had never really known what a trout looked like. George raced into the water and returned with a stone, the knees of his knickers soaked.

"You've got to hit him over the head," he said, handing the stone to Drake. The second blow stunned the trout—even killed it, perhaps, though the body was still quivering when Drake finally extracted the hook.

He caught two more trout—a smaller one at the loop below, and another, as large as the first, far up at the fourth cascade. He had to wade into the water to get the last one.

"They've got to be opened and gutted," said George, who had assumed command of the expedition, as a matter of course.

" Well, gut 'em, then," replied Drake. " I have no knife." He gazed at his four trout—he loved them. They were wonderful.

George did have a knife, which he thrust first into the earth as a cleansing measure, then into each trout near the ventral fin, slitting them open. Tobias, in a state of considerable agitation, looked on. Drake averted his eyes. Once the fish were gutted, with intestines, bladders, and blood soaking into the grass, Tobias sniffed at the mess, walked disdainfully away, and seated himself at some distance.

" You have to stuff them with nettles," George informed his pupil.

" Why do you have to stuff them with nettles? "

" You just have to."

" Where are you going to find nettles? "

" Wherever there are people, there are nettles," said George. It sounded both sagacious and conclusive. And, as a matter of fact, he did return presently with a handful of nettles which had the fresh green tang of the woods about them.

Meantime Drake had been lying on his back in the grass, thinking of nothing at all. It was glorious to lie in the grass, glorious to fish for trout, glorious to be in Clearwater—an unshaven fellow named Drake in Clearwater. Above all, it was immeasurably glorious not to be in Hollywood. To the devil with Hollywood and everything in it. Everything? Yes—don't inquire too closely—everything.

He sat up and watched George stuffing and packing the trout with nettles.

" Doesn't it sting? " he asked.

" No," replied George. " Not if you take a good grip." George had a philosophical turn of mind—there was no getting away from it.

He carried the rod on the way home, while Drake shouldered the bag of trout. He could feel their coolness through the water-drenched canvas. He was happy—tired but happy. George walked ahead with Tobias, chattering to the dog. Drake fell behind, and at every turn in the road Tobias would stop to look back and wait for his master. A two hours' walk down a mountain side is no mean task for a man unaccustomed to such exertion. The hollows behind his knees tingled, and there was a slight burning sensation between his shoulder-blades—a little sunburn, perhaps. Rather odd, for a man coming north from California's glowing sunshine. Drake drew his shoulder-blades together, conscious of his own

muscles. It was all so pleasant: the tiny pain and the fatigue in his thighs and the weight of the bag and the fact that his ears were deafened through having listened for hours to the roar of river and waterfall. Four fine trout. Quiet sleep. Rest. No pains in the stomach. No yearning for Donka—just as though there were no Donka.

That was Wednesday. Thursday and Friday passed in the same way. Each was a good day—each a little better than the day before. No newspapers, no letters, no women, no triumphs. The simple thing: rain and sunlight, lake and mountains, morning and evening. Such peace that the loudest sounds to be heard in Clearwater were the voices of the children.

It was probably the first time in his life that he had ever known peace, this Edward O. Drake, this Oliver Dent, this handsome, charming young man whose placarded smile was the most brilliant in the world, who yet looked to Mr. Colmore as though he had been overworking.

Lying there in the grass, gazing into the sky, it seemed to Edward Drake that his life had never known peace, that his restlessness had begun even before his birth. He had often been told the tale of how his mother had spent hours before his advent into the world, pacing back and forth in front of the statues in the Athens museum. She had longed for a beautiful child, and she had borne a beautiful child. There had been two boys before him, and when he arrived his mother was approaching forty, a prey to the nervousness of a beautiful woman whose beauty was deserting her. His father was secretary to the Embassy, but he gave up his post at Athens when his wife's nervousness developed into melancholia. He had never stayed long at any post. Life with his neurasthenic wife had made him irritable—or perhaps he had been irritable to begin with. The atmosphere in Edward Oliver's parental home quivered with tension: lightning flashed, thunder rolled, storms broke. Papa could never get along with anyone. He was always bringing home tales of some pet enemy—the ambassador, the second secretary, the first attaché—railing against them in a voice that trembled with rage. Mamma had weeping spells and could not sleep. Her room and the whole house smelt of ether. The houses were always changing. The nurses who took charge of him were always changing—the language they spoke, the colour of their skin, the habits they had, the discipline they meted out—always different, always changing.

Athens, Cairo, Constantinople, Warsaw, Petrograd. Mamma died. Papa was pensioned off. Half a year at a school in Zuoz, Switzerland. Too expensive. St. Thomas's in London. Smell of green soap. Disagreeable masters. You were never alone. Edward Oliver had never in his life been alone. At home there had been his brothers—older than he and jealous of the youngest. Here there were his classmates, his dormitory companions. Edward Oliver hated the common sleeping-rooms, loathed them with a loathing that developed into a kind of hysteria with him. He would lie awake at night till all the rest were asleep, then draw the blankets tight over his head. He would hide himself so that he could sleep. Oh, the unforgettable smell of that hot cheap cotton into which he breathed night after night. He would force himself to wake before the others in the morning. He could not stand having anyone see him asleep, God knows why. He was always the strongest, handsomest boy in the class, and he behaved as a fellow of his appearance was expected to behave. He may have felt a subconscious fear that he looked different when he was asleep—more like himself—shyer, sadder, weaker. For the rest, he was all that anyone could have asked : good at football and hockey, and the finest swimmer in the school. The fact that he slept too little was just a hollow little sore spot encysted deep within his organism.

Oxford at last—at last a room of his own—a few square yards of air that belonged to him alone. But once the women discovered him, things grew worse. They were violent, unblushing. The first woman to win him was a widow. She reminded him a little of his mother, and he submitted wonderingly to what followed. She had many successors. Each of them demanded something—each of them claimed to be, to want, to give something new and different—but it was always the same. As a result, he grew peculiarly arrogant and lonely, with that insidious kind of loneliness which attacks those who are never left to themselves.

Nevertheless, Oxford was good. It was the only home Edward Oliver had ever known.

His father's death. A surprisingly meagre inheritance. Fraternal strife, jealously hidden from the world. He had to leave Oxford. A friend took Edward Oliver under his wing, and he was soon slipping rapidly into the depths of London's artistic Bohemia. Again he began sleeping too little. He was exhibited like some freak of nature to all and sundry. It was then that he discovered whisky and gin. Never having

drunk before, he had been well on the way to a reserved and haughty eccentricity. Now that he had taken to drinking, he was exactly what they wanted him to be—glitteringly radiant and a little silly. They dragged him to little art clubs, to exhibitions of unsuccessful artists, to studio costume parties. They painted and modelled him in the nude, unaware that he was suffering. He had no understanding of himself and could make no protest. Finally he was discovered for the films.

Then came Hollywood—the overwhelming success—the tremendous publicity. He had a whole house of his own now, but he belonged to himself still less than he had in his little room at Magdalen College. He was combed and curried to sleekness by publicity men and directors. He really had not much to offer beyond the fact that he looked well—extraordinarily well—better than anyone else. He had no overweening opinion of himself. They covered with paint the trace of lonely pride, the touch of distinction that he did possess. There was a suggestion of indestructible cleanliness about him which was new to the films. They exaggerated it—scrubbed him with soap, rubbed brilliantine into his hair, burnished him bright. And he emerged, the dazzling product of an astute industry—Oliver Dent.

Oliver Dent—a creature gorged with things for which he had never been hungry—denied the one thing he had ever craved—peace. Peace in which to find himself.

And then one day, when they had been shooting in the mountains and had stopped at a lonely house to get water for their radiator, he had thought: "I would like to come back to this place and be quiet and fish." He had noted the name—Clearwater Inn—and the lake and the mountain, and gone on his way. He had often spoken of his desire to go to Clearwater for the fishing. But he had been obliged to make pictures. He had gone to the big hotel at Honolulu with one picture—and with another and Ria Mara to Paris (nor had he found the cold, glassy, tingling quality of his love affair with her too distasteful). Then with Donka Morescu to Rhodes. Rhodes was no picture, but neither was it a rest. Rhodes was a passionate enchantment, a feverish dream, an intoxicating frenzy without rhyme or reason. Rhodes had been good. But Clearwater was better. Curious that it had needed a touch of airsickness and pressure on the stomach and a strange, deep, secret dread to bring him here at last.

He lay on his back in the grass and gazed into the sky. The river was rushing by—he had caught trout—three on

Thursday, six on Friday. They were lying in the grass beside him—six dead trout—all gold and silver—their gills bleeding —stuffed with nettles. Red mountain pinks nodding into his face—a little cloud overhead, dissolving into nothingness. It was quiet—and he was alone with himself at last—and it was quiet.

Yes, Clearwater was very good—the best thing, on the whole, that had ever happened to Edward Drake, the human being, or to Oliver Dent, the film star—those four days in Clearwater—from Tuesday evening to Friday night.

The street you take to the new hospital in Seattle leads up a steep hill between the dirty, prosaic little houses of the Chinese quarter. Mr. Colmore's old Ford was toiling up that street in low gear, making considerable clatter and as good speed as possible. The owner of Clearwater Inn cast an occasional glance over his shoulder to see how his passenger was standing the bumps. Drake, huddled in the rear seat, tightened his lips and made the best of them. His eyes were circled by leaden rings, and from time to time he would try to moisten his dry, chapped lips with his tongue, which was also dry.

The new linoleum, covering the floor of the hospital lobby, seemed to him very slippery and made walking difficult. Even Tobias, running unleashed beside him, was sliding all over it, his claws clicking.

"Mr. Drake for Dr. Olafson," Colmore informed the nurse in the little reception room. "We got in touch with the doctor by phone. We're from Clearwater Inn."

The nurse—a bespectacled, cross-grained individual—confirmed the statement by phone before proceeding to admit the patient.

"You can't take the dog to the consulting-room with you, though," she said sternly.

"Suppose you tell him that," Mr. Colmore suggested. "Just try it. He all but tore the house down when we tried leaving him at home." Tobias, staring straight out of eyes that were a little dim to-day, pretended not to know they were talking about him. Naturally, he was not going to let them remove master from his safe keeping—master was in a bad enough way, as it was. Besides, they had forgotten to feed him, Tobias. The nurse looked at him and sighed.

"Take the elevator, please," she said. Another nurse—a young, over-lively girl—escorted the patient to the elevator. It was one of those roomy hospital elevators, whose passengers

are always expecting to see the stretchers of the dying rolled in. Drake could not control his twitching eyebrows, though he had stood by unconcernedly enough during the admission formalities, merely moistening his lips now and then. He was exhausted by the terrible night he had been through—not dizzy exactly, yet not quite steady on his legs either.

"Can you walk?" asked the lively nurse, sliding her firm arm under his elbow.

"Thanks," said Drake, disengaging himself. "I can walk all right."

They passed through a white corridor—Operating Room 1, Operating Room 2, Laboratory, Rooms 56 to 86, Section J—careful—steps . . . Dr. Olafson—apply in Room 87. This way, please.

"You're to stay here and wait for me," Drake told Tobias with as much severity as he could muster. Tobias turned a doleful gaze on his master, and his black eyes filmed with tears, though he neither whimpered nor howled. He stretched himself close to the door, his head between his paws, and proceeded to spend a harrowing half-hour.

Master had been entrusted to him—to him, Tobias, and to no one else—not, if you please, to Pluck, the Chow—and he must have failed in his duty, for master had fallen ill. Tobias licked his dirty coat like a cat—he knew he was dirty again, and the knowledge mortified him. There could not have been a more conscience-stricken little Sealyham in the world than this somewhat over-sensitive Tobias, to whom such terrible things were happening on his travels with his master.

Dr. Olafson's office was ruled by that spirit of Optimism-at-all-costs, characteristic of the modern hospital with all its up-to-date equipment, characteristic of the ambitious, up-to-date physician. Pale yellow walls, huge windows, sunshine, not a superfluous stick of furniture in the room, psychological effect on the patient. Dr. Olafson was a tall individual, with a face as sandy as his hair. He had, so to speak, no eyes, for his glasses were so thick as to be almost hemispheres, concealing the eyes and making it necessary for him to lean disagreeably close to the patient.

The usual questions, the usual examination. His fingers smelt of a mixture of cigarettes and infants' soap, and their tapping was far from gentle. Drake made his report. He had had an attack which had lasted eight hours: pain, nausea, chills, agony. Eight hours of pain change a man: they change him from a human being to a thing which submits to whatever

happens. Sitting there with his shoulders sagging a little, Drake made his report. He was wearing his light brown lounge suit, and the faded mountain pinks of his last trip to the waterfalls still decorated his buttonhole. He undressed, bared his handsome torso, breathed obediently, expanded his epigastrium, sat down again and waited.

"Mhm," said the doctor. He seemed to be taking it rather more seriously than the man in Winslow. He, too, would have been inclined to suspect the appendix, had the patient still owned an appendix. He did not, unfortunately. Dr. Olafson stared so fixedly at the patient that he failed to see him.

"And what sort of sensation have you now?"

"To tell you the truth—I really feel as though I'd managed to poison myself, somehow. There's something in the stomach—here—if you could get that out, I'd be all right."

"Poison yourself? What with? Canned food?"

"No. Gin, more likely. I've been having these attacks lately whenever I've drunk gin."

"Good Lord, man, that's a lot of eyewash!" exclaimed the doctor, with something approaching human warmth. "There's no gin left in the whole of America that you could poison yourself with. It's the quantity, not the quality, that's dangerous. However, since you have this susceptibility to gin, I'd stick to whisky, if I were you. What?"

His hands still pressed to his body, Drake was gazing at the doctor out of leaden-rimmed eyes.

"If you could just get this thing out," he said, "I'd be all right in a jiffy. I'm not really ill, you know." He smiled politely, as one smiles at the witticisms of influential superiors.

"Well, in that case, we'll do you the favour of pumping out your stomach first. You'll find that's great fun. Then you can spend the night here, and to-morrow we'll see. We'll put you into shape, never fear. And in any event, you'll get no gin here," concluded Dr. Olafson, pressing his buzzer. His otherwise bare desk—the desk of an optimist—was equipped with a battery of buzzers. "The nurse will look after you."

The lively nurse appeared, led the patient to a room in Dr. Olafson's private pavilion, and proceeded to look after him. A patient is a thing devoid of will, devoid of character, devoid of sex. The man, Edward O. Drake, became No. 62.

"Stomach pump for No. 62," the lively nurse informed a freckled nurse, who was emerging from the laboratory. The

freckled nurse was worn out. She assisted at operations, and her nerves weren't equal to the prolonged strain. Her hair smelled of ether from the anæsthetics. The patient in No. 62 recognised the smell. His mother's bedroom had always smelt like that. He swallowed the little rubber tube submissively and abandoned himself to the process of the stomach pump. It wasn't nearly so much fun as the doctor had promised, and left him exhausted. When it was over, he lay in his bed in No. 62, waiting to see whether the pains, which had started again, were going to get better or worse. They got better.

"I feel much better," he informed his dog. Tobias had somehow managed to get himself installed in the room. He had ingratiated himself with the nurses, and was even hoping he would be able to make them understand that he was hungry, and master had forgotten to feed him.

Patients have one great and mitigating advantage over non-patients—they have the right to be sick. Sickness is their proper and natural state. Oliver Dent, the film star, had no right under any circumstances to be sick. One shudders to think of the clamour that would have been raised in the front office and in the newspapers if Oliver Dent, the film star, had taken it into his head to fall ill. Nor was it really permissible for Edward O. Drake, the healthy man, to be ill. It was disgraceful that a healthy man should not be able to stick out a three hours' fight. A healthy man fights against illness. It is his moral duty, whatever gruelling struggles that duty may involve. But the patient has a right to be ill, which knowledge is infinitely tranquillising and comforting. He lies in a metal bed, specially built to accommodate suffering bodies. A white blanket, miraculously light, covers his limbs—a green-shaded lamp stands on his bed-table—a bell lies close to his right hand. A nurse looks in from time to time and asks whether he is comfortable. If he cannot sleep, they give him pills. At night the ships toot in the harbour. Everything is a little unfamiliar—the unfamiliar furniture throwing unfamiliar shadows on unfamiliar walls. The night nurse comes in: she is old, and there is something soothingly maternal about her, but her shoes squeak. No. 62 in the new hospital in Seattle. Not a serious case, but puzzling. He lies there, a little apart from life, like a chessman removed from the game.

Thus three days passed—with examinations and observations and X-ray pictures that produced no results—with liquid nourishment that tasted flat but did him good. Drake

stayed in bed for most of the first day. On the second day his patience was exhausted and he got up, wandered about the narrow room in his pyjamas, then sat on the balcony, which afforded a view of an identical balcony opposite, where another patient sat. His thoughts turned to Hollywood for a brief space. He even wrote a few lines to Jerry, explaining that he had given up his idea of going to Europe, and was contemplating a fishing trip here in the neighbourhood of Seattle. No address—he did not want any mail. Best regards. He put on his old red dressing-gown and went across to the X-ray nurse to take a look at his pictures. He held them up to the light like a film test. A few cloudy shadows on glass slides, utterly devoid of meaning or interest. Dr. Olafson's fingers grew harder and harder and his diagnoses more and more uncertain. By the third day Oliver had developed a violent loathing for the doctor, which was shared by Tobias. The doctor was the first human being Tobias had ever snapped at. What else could the man expect, coming as he did straight from the operating room with the smell of fresh blood all over him—what else could he expect of an uneasy, bewildered little dog? Tobias had increased his vigilance tenfold. There were too many enemies surrounding master. Master, to be sure, had told him that he was feeling better, much better, almost well. But, oh, Tobias—scenting things out with his quivering, moist, black nostrils—Tobias knew that it was not true.

On the night of the third day, despite the cajoleries of the squeaking night nurse, and a stronger sleeping-powder, Oliver could not sleep. He sat up in bed and started thinking. He had been letting himself drift a little these last days; now he realised, with a sudden cold pang of terror, that his three weeks' leave would soon be over, and they would be starting the production of *Milestones*. Not only would he have to *be* well by that time—he would have to *look* well, too. He got up, switched on the lamp, and inspected himself in the little mirror over the washbasin. There was not much light in No. 62, but enough to reveal some hint of the havoc wrought in his face. He could find nothing pleasant to contemplate but the small, silky, newly acquired moustache, which was darker than his hair, and curled up a little at the ends. It was decidedly jolly-looking, and Oliver smiled into the mirror. His lips were always dry and cracked now, and smiling strained them. It was a mediocre smile, in any case, unfit for exhibition. Oliver crept back into bed and continued his thoughts. He

had lost track of the days of the week, and had to spread his fingers over the blanket and count on them like a child.

The fixed point to which he returned was the last night with Donka—that insane night in Pasadena. Flight to Winslow—stay in Winslow—three days by rail to Seattle—the bus to Clearwater—four days of trout-fishing—the attack on Friday night—one, two, three days in the hospital—this would be, wait a second, this would be Monday night. How can a man live so unmethodically? It was high time he got straightened out and discovered where he stood.

"I've had enough of this spoiled stomach of mine," he fumed. "I've had enough of provincial doctors. I've had enough of Olafson. He's so near-sighted, he's dangerous. If I don't watch out, he'll have me on the table before he knows it, slicing me up. Not if I can help it. I'm going straight to New York—to Dworsky." Having reached which decision, he drank some water, and an hour later managed to fall asleep.

Next day, despite the remonstrances of Dr. Olafson and the blandishments of the lively nurse, the patient in No. 62 fled from the Seattle Hospital. He put on his suit and shoes, both of which seemed to have grown a little strange. And his coat didn't fit right. A meticulous shave left him feeling rather tired, but clean and well. He paid his bill and looked up a convenient train. He was bursting with spirits and vitality, which he squandered recklessly, even taking his much-travelled valise from the nurse's hand and carrying it to the elevator himself. The mountain pinks in his buttonhole were all brown and withered but, with a little smile, he decided to leave them undisturbed. They were a fragment of Clearwater. The good days, the good nights in Clearwater—the waterfalls and the lake and the peace—the happy, happy time. He wrote a sentimental little farewell card to Mr. and Mrs. Colmore: "*Many thanks. Many heartfelt thanks. I'll be back. Don't forget your faithful Edward O. Drake. P.S. George can use my fishing tackle while I'm gone.*" He shook the hand of the nettled Dr. Olafson with a sense of repugnance, and tipped the porter over-generously. Then the taxi was rolling downhill between frolicking Chinese children to the railway station. Tobias could not restrain himself—he thrust his cool, gleaming black nose into his master's face and kissed him. Master didn't even scold. "I know, Tobias," he said gently. "I know, old fellow."

It is a four-day journey from Seattle to Chicago, a cruel,

heartbreaking journey for a man who is sick. Poor Oliver, poor Edward Drake—the pain, the dark, gnawing process of disintegration kept burrowing deeper and deeper now. True, there were no more attacks—no more of those violent, lacerating seizures, but the pain and the sickness never left him now. New symptoms had appeared—sinister, terrifying. Bloody excretions—an organic decay which gave him food for thought. The train made such a racket—such a frightful, furious racket as it tore its cars through the days and nights, over the mountains and across the vast plains. Drake, in his drawing-room, tried to sit up, but couldn't. He would feel better in bed. He rang for the coloured porter and had his bed made up, in broad daylight.

"I'm not very well," he said, the remnant of his former smile flickering over his wasted face. Nothing more to worry about—no one recognised him now. He lay in bed, suffering agonies. His mother's little ring with the chip diamonds, which for years had been too tight for his finger, fell off one morning and rolled out of sight. The finger looked strange, with its circlet of paler skin. Everything looked strange. If only the train would stop—if it would just stand still for fifteen minutes—he would feel better. The train stopped, but he did not feel better. He felt worse—the pain grew so agonising in the silence—the terror so wild. If only the train would go on—on and on—if only the train would take him quickly to New York and Dworsky, he would feel better. Dworsky was an authority, a miracle-worker—Dworsky of New York—the greatest surgeon in the United States. He would perform a miracle. He would remove IT from Oliver's stomach and cure him quickly—practically on the spot. Ten more days' leave before *Milestones*. At worst, they would have to postpone the production. Or if it came to the very worst and his convalescence took too long, someone else would have to play the part—Williams or someone. But that was a thought Oliver refused to entertain. If his pillows were propped higher, he would feel better. If he had some water he would feel better. If he tried keeping his stomach empty, absolutely empty, he would feel better. If he could sleep he would feel better. If it were colder, if it were warmer, if he were only in Chicago. If he could just have some morphine he would feel better.

But he did not feel better.

He was all alone. They had thrust Tobias relentlessly into the luggage van and tied him there. He had to wear a

muzzle, because he snapped and was vicious and acted a little as though he had rabies. The negress on duty in the car looked in from time to time. She was a gentle, ample woman and had kind, brown hands with pale finger-nails, and pale, velvety palms. Her eyes were compassionate, and her body smelled good, like freshly baked bread. She looked as though she had borne and suckled a dozen children. Oliver felt no shame with her. She helped him, propped him up. There came a moment of extremity when he buried his head in her breast and groaned aloud—for half an hour, till the attack had spent itself. The coloured nurses of his childhood returned to him in her comforting presence. Her name was Mary Jones, and she came from Oklahoma. He gave her fifty dollars when they reached Chicago, and two big, solitary tears rolled down her cheeks as she turned him over to the porters.

His condition was now such that he could not walk unaided. One porter carried his bag, two others supported him under the arms, the white-glistening eyes in their black faces rolled solicitously toward him. A fourth brought up the rear with Tobias. Tobias, too, had changed. He was a dirty grey bundle, two wet black tear-grooves running from his eyes. His nose no longer gleamed, but was grey-looking, as though it had turned mouldy. He threw a reproachful glance at master, whose body sagged forward, whose legs dragged behind him as he moved across the platform. Then he whimpered and, flattening himself against the ground, licked master's shoes.

There was more than a touch of heroism in Oliver's passage from the station to the taxi, from the taxi to his room at the hotel.

" I'm not altogether well," he explained to the maid, who had to help him into bed. He still wore that shame-faced, apologetic smile when he was forced to admit his illness. He lay in bed, and his helplessness knew no bounds. For a few moments he seriously considered telephoning to Hollywood and sending for Dan. Not Jerry—he was too weak and impractical—no, Dan, the valet, with his big hands and broad black smile. But he had no time to lie around here in a Chicago hotel, waiting for Dan. He had to get on as fast as he could—straight to New York, to Dworsky.

The hotel doctor was calm and sympathetic and a little sceptical about his own knowledge. He suggested calling in a colleague—a specialist, a man of eminence. He suggested all sorts of things—transference to a hospital, a thorough examination, X-rays—the whole rigmarole of Seattle all over again.

"Thank you," whispered Oliver. "I can't stop here. If you could just help me out a little till to-morrow. Just so that I can get to New York."

"Help you out? How do you mean? What have you in mind?"

"Morphine, perhaps," suggested Drake, from between parched lips. The doctor threw him a brief, suspicious glance. He knew these dope-fiends who shammed attacks for the sake of a shot of their precious stuff. But, no—this man was no fake, with his gaunt face and his bloodless skin and the lines of pain under the jaunty little moustache. This was serious.

Oliver was given morphine. Strange, that it should not have helped at all, not even have put him to sleep. Chicago's nights are noisy. The din rises to the twenty-fourth floor, and the searchlights along the wide lake front cut the darkness in two. That night in Chicago—alone, mortally ill, at the last stop before his destination would be reached—that was the worst night Oliver was to be called upon to live through. He would lose consciousness later and things would be better. But that night his mind was still clear. He had no choice but to suffer and endure; there was nothing left in him but the instinct of the animal, trying to crawl into a hole for the final struggle.

A nurse accompanied him from Chicago to New York. Amid the bustle of the Grand Central Station a few people turned to look at the stretcher that was carrying a young man out. His eyes closed, Oliver could follow the steps of the bearers in the jolting rhythm of the stretcher, could smell the station fumes, hear the strident clamour which made him ill and dizzy. He kept falling down and down as they bore him along: it was like a ride in an elevator whose cables had snapped. This was a fearful journey on which he was being carried. He didn't know that, with his closed eyes in his pain-racked face, he looked as though he were already dead. He still felt himself to be Oliver Dent, tall and handsome—he was wearing a moustache now, and flowers in his buttonhole. What if someone recognised him here—recognised him, Oliver Dent, being carried through Grand Central on a stretcher?

The door of the ambulance slammed shut behind him. The car swayed off with him. Someone laid a hand on his forehead, and another on his pulse. His mind was no longer quite clear, but clear enough to supply the Dworsky Sanitarium with the information they required, to conceal the fact that he was Oliver Dent. They rolled the stretcher with its burden into

the elevator. They wheeled him along corridors that he could not see. They undressed him and lifted him into a bed—a kind, friendly bed—a bed that seemed to him to ease his pain. It seemed to him, too, that some of the walls were missing. A kind of humming coolness was blowing in from somewhere, and when he opened his eyes black tatters hung in the air.

The man who roused him was Dworsky. A stern man—an authority—a man with grey hair who refused to allow him to sink back into the shadows. Orders were rapped out sharply here, and sick men were denied the comfort of lapsing into that state of apathy which is inimical to life. It was true that he suffered excruciatingly on being recalled to consciousness, but he remembered at the same time that he had to get well quickly. His statement was perfectly lucid—he had to get well as quickly as he could because he had professional obligations to fulfil. As coherently as possible, he told all there was to tell about his illness. He felt better, more hopeful, in Dworsky's brusque, disciplinary presence.

Dworsky wasted no time. Back to the stretcher with the patient. Off to a little room for an examination under glaring lights. On to the X-ray room. Amid the preparations, while all the lead screens were being adjusted, he was seized by a violent attack of nausea. He felt as though he must vomit up his own heart. Let God be his witness, if that was not exactly how he felt. He smiled comfortingly at the nurses who were cleaning him up. A curious thing—that smile of apology which the very ill turn on the robust in an effort to console or deceive them. Dying is a disgraceful business—there is no denying it. Tenfold disgraceful for a being so beautiful, so arrogant, so sick for solitude as this Edward O. Drake. Everything drops away from a creature in such plight, leaving nothing behind but the diseased organ with its pain and decay.

"What've we got in 168?" asked the night nurse, coming on duty.

"168? A stomach," replied the day nurse. It was the professional jargon of hospitals. There was nothing more to be said on the subject.

Three days after the patient had been admitted to the sanitarium, Dworsky decided to operate on the stomach. He was inclined to the opinion that he had one of those rare cases of *linitis plastica* to deal with here, or, less technically put, a destructive inflammation of the lining of the stomach. Once more he dragged the patient out of his twilight state, administered a hypodermic to restore him to full consciousness,

and asked his consent to the operation. It was not until the grave-faced doctor was inquiring for the address of his nearest relative, who would have to be notified, that Oliver realised the seriousness of his condition.

" I have no relatives," he whispered.

He was experiencing considerable difficulty with his speech —his lips were stiff or bloated—in any case, they weren't *his* lips. He was noting his own reactions carefully. Nothing hurt him, but he kept slipping down in the bed—growing small, somehow.

" Operation? " he said. " What? Serious? "

" For one who knows how to operate," replied Dworsky, " no operation is serious." He was the greatest surgeon in the country and took, perhaps, a rather one-sided view of the affair.

" Shall I be well afterward? " asked Oliver childishly.

" Let's hope so."

Oliver pondered the equivocal reply for a moment. His mind was growing clearer second by second. He had never really seen Dworsky's face whole, since he had been lying here —only sections of it: clouded, misty fragments—an eye, a smile, a knitted brow under bristling grey hair. Now, with a stark clarity of vision, he was seeing it all—seeing it as distinctly as he had once seen the fish he had killed in Clearwater. Dworsky had grey eyes with large black pupils and little red veins in the eyeballs—he could see them. He could see the trout, too—a dead trout—a ring of gold, a ring of silver, a ring of black. Bleeding gills.

" Is it dangerous? " he asked.

" Not to operate," replied Dworsky, " would be more dangerous." He hesitated a moment. He didn't believe in glossing over facts. Patients had more backbone when they knew where they stood. " There's some danger," he said. " We'll have to do our level best."

Oliver had sagged back among the pillows again. He was thinking hard. He lifted his hand, felt for his forehead, found it with some difficulty, and drew the hand reflectively across it. It *was* dangerous, then. It was clearly a question of life and death. They didn't make a hell of a fuss over a fellow here, it seemed to him. Dworsky seemed pretty cold-blooded about the whole affair. He might be less cold-blooded, thought Oliver, if he knew who I was. He gulped twice, and his weary, stupefied heart began beating more quickly.

Up to that moment he had been clutching at a single idea:

no one must know that Oliver Dent was sick. For many reasons it was out of the question. It was a hellish business, being famous and sick. The rumours, the reporters, the newspapers, the publicity hounds, his rivals in the film game, the self-important and the self-seekers, the malicious and the curious, the sympathetic and the thoughtless—the whole pack of them at his heels with hue and cry. That was what he had been avoiding thus far—hiding away, proud and silent as a sick beast. But now that it was serious, now that it was a matter of life and death, that silent pride was suddenly shattered to bits. Edward Drake, a mute phantom, fashioned of finer stuff, receded—and what remained was Oliver Dent, a sick man whose hands clung to Dworsky's wrists—a star in mortal fear of death.

"You've got to pull me through," he whispered insistently. "I'm Oliver Dent." He stared apprehensively up at the doctor, to see what sort of impression he had produced. Yes, he had produced an impression.

"There'll be an awful hullaballoo," he whispered from between his useless lips, "if you let me die." It sounded both threatening and piteous. He was frightened by the word "die" even on his own tongue. Dworsky loosed Oliver's hands and laid them back on the covers.

"Nonsense," he said. "There's no question of that. I'll stick by you—if you'll stick by me." He scrutinised the face on the pillow. It was still beautiful—the face of a crucifix, the *ecce homo* written large all over it—but it bore not the faintest resemblance to the placarded, advertised face of Oliver Dent.

Dworsky was no friend of the films, nor did he think highly of film actors—perhaps because he had treated too many of them. "Good Lord!" he thought. "What a mess we're in now!" before banishing the predicament from his mind.

"You agree to the operation, then?" he concluded, rising. Oliver's gaze followed him. He couldn't move his head easily, but his eyes were still functioning. The doctor merged into the shadows beyond the footboard of the bed.

"Doesn't the dog bother you?" he asked, from out of the darkness, having come upon the grimy, panting little bundle huddled in a corner.

"What dog?" asked Oliver. Then he remembered. "Is Tobias there? I'd forgotten all about him." At the sound of his name, Tobias pricked up his ears, and a tremor ran through his body. But he was too tired to walk as far as the bed. His heart had been aching since the day they had taken him from

master and tied him up in the luggage van. He could do no more than wag his tail feebly and stay where he was, his dry muzzle buried in his own dirty coat.

The operation took place the following morning. A sound stupor had been induced before hand by the administration of morphine-scopolamin, yet Oliver counted to eighty-four under the anæsthetic before losing consciousness. At the last moment the piercing lights of the operating room were transformed into spots, and the whole scene into a set where a film was being shot that Oliver did not want to play in. Dworsky, standing there in his big rubber gloves, waiting for his patient to go under, made a mental note of this stubborn resistance as symptomatic of constitutions inured to alcohol. He performed a remarkable operation—his two assistants talked of it for weeks afterwards. He removed practically the entire stomach, tied the brief stump that remained to the duodenum, and completed the operation in an hour and eight minutes. Oliver Dent was carried back to Room 158 and his stomach was sent down to the pathological laboratory in the basement, presided over by a certain Dr. Ploughfield.

Toward evening the effects of the anæsthetic began to wear off. Oliver woke to the sensation that he was composed of innumerable fragments which were returning, one by one, from dark, distant corners of the earth and fitting themselves together: into a body first, then into a blue-red inferno of raw pain and, finally, into himself. Still incapable of speech, he opened his eyes, which asked his insistent question for him. Dworsky was at the bedside, bent watchfully over him, his hand on the patient's pulse. He looked kind, gentler than usual.

"I think it's going to be all right," he said slowly, distinctly, that the words might penetrate all the mists and reach the sick man's mind. "I think we're going to pull you through." Oliver made a little grimace, which was intended for a smile. Dworsky was still holding his hand tight.

Suddenly the dog rose from his far corner and approached the bed, his little paws pattering. Sitting up on his hind legs, he thrust out his tongue as if to lick master's hand; but finding no hand, he merely sniffed, his breath coming in sharp gasps. After which he dropped back to the ground and made his way to the door. There he paused, lifted his head and set up a long, loud, despairing howl.

Dworsky was an authority. Tobias was only a little Sealyham terrier.

Yet the great doctor flinched, as though he had understood what the little dog meant by his howling.

It was Joey Ray, the little fellow in the Publicity Department, who broke the news to them at the studio. His freckled face was white and streaming with sweat as he dashed past the gateman and into Bill Turner's suite of offices.

"I've got to see Bill right away," he gasped. The optimistic secretaries were hardened to hysterical seizures of every variety. Joey was informed that Mr. Turner was in conference.

"Well," he panted, "he'll have to drop his conference. No conference can be as important as what I've got to tell him."

"The studio won't collapse," the secretary pointed out imperturbably, "if you don't see Mr. Turner to-day."

"That's exactly what it will do!" crowed Joey. "You can take my word for it." His voice kept changing pitch, as it so often did. He was bursting with a sense of his own importance, athrill with that curious exultation known to everyone who has had tidings of disaster to impart. He had received the news by phone from a journalist friend in New York—no one else knew it yet—he had a ten- or fifteen-minute lead over the rest of the pack. He was in luck—this was his chance—his. He'd come from Lundenburg, a provincial town in Moravia, and worked his way up from the bottom. He had become American to his finger-tips. Now he was trying to carve out a career for himself, so that he could make an impression on the people at home in Lundenburg. He did an unprecedented thing. He thrust the secretary aside, tore the door open, and rushed, unannounced, into Bill Turner's office.

Bill Turner was, of course, engaged in no conference. He was seated in his swivel chair, his feet on the desk, reading a letter.

"Oliver Dent's dying," cried Joey Ray, flinging his arms wide and standing there like a bearer of ill tidings in a Greek tragedy.

"Gone off your head, kid?" inquired Bill.

Eighteen minutes later Bill Turner was mobilising his forces. All the executives were summoned to an immediate conference. They were called by phone from their offices, routed out of their homes in Santa Monica and Beverly, dragged from the stages where they were working, from the bosoms of their families and the arms of love. The Publicity Department was girding up its loins for the fray, its activities directed not by Keller but by Joey Ray, whose presence of mind had

prevented the newspapers from getting hold of the mess before the studio authorities themselves. It was Sam Houston who called the thing a mess, dearly though he loved Oliver Dent, and impossible though he found it to keep the sudden moisture from gathering at the corners of his eyes. They had already got in touch with the Dworsky Sanitarium by phone, had had the facts verified and been informed that Oliver Dent was "still alive." They had sent for Jerry, Oliver's timorous secretary, who was utterly in the dark as to what had been going on; he stood gazing at them with the helpless eyes of a rabbit, and took advantage of a moment when no one was looking to faint dead away. He was removed to the studio infirmary and, shortly thereafter, hatless and baggageless, departed for New York in a private plane, stopping only long enough to borrow a handkerchief from the young director, Brown, who had called off work on *Billy Gets Married*. Work had been stopped everywhere, or, rather, had come to a stop of its own accord—crumbled away, as it were, regardless of the waste of money entailed. And from all the sets and stages people were pouring, gathering in groups, discussing the sensational news. It began spreading through the town at six or thereabouts. A hasty extra was issued:

OLIVER DENT DANGEROUSLY ILL
CONDITION GRAVE BUT NOT HOPELESS

screamed the headlines. News-vendors bellowed it through all the streets. Hawking their damp sheets, they skipped in and out among the traffic as though they were skipping over the stones of a river bed. The newspaper and studio switchboards were swamped with calls. Crowds collected at the grilled gate of the Phœnix Picture Corporation. The radio announcer spoke in quivering, ministerial tones of "Ol, whom we all love." Telegrams to New York, phone calls to New York. The *Chief* jammed with people who were going to New York simply that they might be in at the death of Oliver Dent —reporters representing all the papers, two writers, eight sob-sisters, delegates of the Phœnix Picture Corporation and of Club 111, Oliver's attorney, Oliver's physician—Dan the valet and Nando the trainer, unbidden and on their own responsibility—Mr. McOlehan of the Publicity Department to direct the important New York publicity campaign—three millionairesses from Pasadena, each of them in her own compartment, each of them in love with Oliver Dent, each of them athirst for stimulating experiences—groups of silent men, whose business

it was impossible to conjecture—photographers, agents, people who were hoping to profit in one fashion or another by the star's death. And in the solitude of a drawing-room, a veiled lady—Ria Mara.

And while Ria Mara was setting out for New York, Donka Morescu was asleep. She lay on her couch in the bungalow, her thumbs childishly tucked into her fists, her cheek resting against Coco, the black consolation pillow. For she had been wretched when she fell asleep—tired out, disheartened, uneasy, and somehow hopeless, God alone knows why. After viewing the rushes of the two previous days, she had lapsed into a state of melancholy. She thought she was frightful, the picture frightful, the photography frightful. She foresaw bankruptcy and artistic ruin. Eisenlohr had sent her to take a nap. The outdoor night scenes were to be started at ten, and he wanted her fresh and in perfect form for the evening. The shutters were closed. A fly buzzed and was silenced by the silent Manuela. Donka slept.

Eisenlohr glanced at the shuttered windows of the bungalow as he drove past. They had sent the car for him to the outskirts of the P.P.C. domains, where he had been making the rounds with Piluyeff and the head of the property department for a final check-up on the details of the sets—the banks of the Neva, the Schlüsselburg, and two Petrograd streets—one with tranquil, columned façades in the Empire style, the other torn up and heaped with barricades. He had been a little nervous, as he always was before a mob scene. It was as though all his efforts were concentrated on gathering energy for the coming evening. He talked incessantly, despite a touch of hoarseness, and kept crumbling things in his fingers and tossing them away. Oliver Dent was his friend—the object of his staunch, sane, masculine affection. Yet his first thought on receipt of the news was not for Oliver, but for Mackenzie. "Mackenzie will be having his troubles with *Milestones* now," he found himself thinking, with a faintly agreeable sensation in the midst of the shock—a sensation shared by everyone in the studio, by everyone in the town. Excitement was keener than grief. Death is always an effective drama for those not called upon to die. . . .

The executive staff of the Phœnix organisation was finally assembled. Bill had summoned them, not to his office, but to Projection Room No. 4, where they seated themselves in rows, as though for a film showing. Bill paced to and fro in front of them as he talked. He seemed to have come straight from a

shower-bath, for his hair was wet and brushed smoothly back from his forehead.

"Boys," he said, "we've all had a great shock, and there's no need for me to tell you what's happened. I've talked to Dworsky. There's something of the pasha about him, but he's a great man just the same. If Ol can be saved, Dworsky'll save him. That's certain. We've had a direct wire installed to the hospital, and from now on we'll get news every hour. I think we've got the Press pretty well in line, too, and the publicity'll be handled as we want it and need it handled. As for Ol," said Bill Turner, removing his glasses for a moment, and replacing them on his nose—"as for Ol—we all know what he means to us. He's a grand fellow and, knowing him as we do, we can't help feeling that he won't let himself be downed. Besides, Dworsky's by no means hopeless. I don't want to start singing Oliver's praises here. It would make me feel—make me feel as though he were dead already, if we sat around here saying pretty things about him. I'd rather say, the confounded son-of-a-gun's got himself and us into a damned tight spot with his drinking and racketing around, and it's up to us to get him and ourselves out of it as fast as we can." (Which statement, uttered in gruff and rather uncertain tones, was the only indication Bill Turner ever gave of his genuine affection for Oliver Dent, and brought two sudden, stinging tears to the eyes of the sensitive Dr. Erbacher.) "So we'll all go on wishing and hoping and taking it for granted that Ol will be back. Meantime, however, we've got to reckon with the fact that he's not here. Which brings us to the two major difficulties I want to discuss with you. First, there's *Milestones*. We're due to start production next Thursday. The sets are ready, the cast's engaged—and besides, we've got nothing to substitute for it. What? Anyone got a suggestion? No. Well, *Milestones* without Dent's a nasty pill to swallow. I think we'll have to build up the woman's part and give it to Ria Mara. What do you say, Mackenzie? Ria's gone? She'll come back for a part, don't worry. Peggy? No. Peggy can't carry a picture by herself yet. Peggy'll have to be dumped this time—and anyway, that's entirely beside the point." (Which was the end of Peggy. Peggy was through. Her moment was over. Her career was finished. Later she was to marry a clerk in a film-cutting bureau.) "The script'll have to be revised immediately to suit Ria Mara. Let Lewis do it. What? His contract's expired? Give him a new contract. You talk

to him, Stewart E. That leaves the problem of Dent's part. Even if we shove it into the background, who's going to play it? What? Williams? Why not Burbank and be done with it?" (Burbank was Hollywood's oldest actor, a specialist in blind old men and long-bearded fathers of murdered sons.) "No, we've got to have something young. We've got to stick to Oliver Dent's type. Think it over, and anyone who has an idea or suggestion. . . . Well, so much for *Milestones*. We're not so badly off there—we still have nine days to arrange the details. *Night of Destiny*—that's the burning question. I believe we've got a big thing there—the best picture we've produced in two years—a masterpiece and sure-fire box office. We've still got six days of outdoor shooting ahead of us, and we've sunk all kinds of money in the production—you all know that. I think you can guess what's on my mind—Donka. Once Donka finds out what's happened to Oliver, we might just as well make up our minds to stop shooting and kiss our three hundred thousand good-bye. I say three hundred thousand, but we won't be able to reckon the actual loss in terms of figures if we have to drop the production. We now have——"

"Why should we have to drop the production?" inquired Stewart E. from the third row.

"Why? Because there'd be no holding Donka if she knew. Donka! Let Donka find out what's happened to Oliver, and it's a cinch she'd be off by the next plane. No, she doesn't know yet. She's asleep, and I've got her bungalow guarded like a harem. She's not to find out till the last possible moment. The last possible moment," repeated Bill and lapsed into silence. In silence he paced the width of the room, head bent, all but treading on the toes of the front-row occupants. His staff maintained an equally unbroken silence. Its more impressionable members—like Dr. Erbacher, for example, and even Eisenlohr, this time—all but stopped breathing. Bill came to a sudden halt, flung up his head, and fixed his eyes on his audience. "If I have my way," he stated, "and if it can possibly be managed, she won't find out till the last foot of this film is shot and finished."

"Right!" cried Eisenlohr promptly, rising to his huge height and thrusting his head forward. "She can't find out—she mustn't find out. The minute she finds out she's off—and good-bye, film!"

"Wait a minute!" All heads turned in the direction of Sam Houston's quiet voice, speaking from the third row.

" I'm willing to bet that Donka sticks. I know Donka. I think I've known her longer than any of you. Donka would die before she'd leave the production flat. She knows her whole future's at stake."

" Says you ! " retorted Bill Turner heatedly. " And I'm telling you that I've known Donka as long as you have and better than you do, and Donka's a creature of impulse, if ever there was one. I swear to you that if Donka wakes up and finds out what's happened, we'll have to stop shooting this very night and pocket a loss of forty thousand in cash. Donka's a savage. Do you remember that ear-boxing affair with Mrs. Delman? Jealous film *diva* boxes ears of millionaire's wife in latter's own home ! That's Donka ! "

" Remember," Eisenlohr chimed in, " how she drove her car through the show window to get the Cadillac her prince took a fancy to after closing hours? That wasn't bad either, what? " He was puffing feverishly at a cheroot so big and black that it looked like a faked cigar.

" You don't have to think back very far," observed Stewart E., " to convince yourself that Donka's cracked. That business of her chasing after Oliver and marching into the Pasadena Hotel with him in her costume and make-up—she hasn't lived that down yet. And what a tit-bit," he murmured, " for the Press ! "

" It's not the business of this meeting," Bill reminded them with a glance at his wrist-watch, " to rehash all the gossip going round about Donka. Our problem is—can we prevent her from discovering Oliver's condition? And how can we prevent it? "

The meeting lapsed into a troubled, thoughtful silence. They were all men of experience and responsibility; they all realised what it would mean to drop a production like *Night of Destiny* midway.

Curious thing—a production of this kind—an intangible process destined to project shadows on a screen and provide material for the dreams of all mankind. The more improbable the dreams, the more valid they are. Therefore, the production—that illusive something or other—must produce sustenance for the unproductive imaginations of millions of people whose toes have been pretty severely trodden on by the realities of everyday life. Which is why the production distrusts reality and devises laws of its own which permit of a cunning escape from reality. The incidentals of the production are always strictly true to life: the smallest back-

ground detail, the very patch on the boot of a Russian revolutionary in *Night of Destiny* must be absolutely accurate and authentic (and woe betide any of the divers individuals responsible for a blunder !).

But the revolution in the foreground is unreal and spurious—revolution, not as it is, but as the average man imagines it. Heroes, heroines, young, old, poor, rich, victors, victims—all of them, and the words they utter, and the tears they shed, and the love they counterfeit—all, all, not as they are, but as the average man imagines them. The average man—that anonymous titan with fifty million sets of average brains.

Is it still possible to remember the time when *Night of Destiny* was a lemon, a script gone wrong, an abortive idea? Since becoming a production, it has taken on grandeur and strength. It is the centre about which everything revolves. It broods like a fever over the studio and its employees. It determines destinies. Its own fortunes, like the fortunes of every production, vary from day to day—going up, down—up, down—like a train scaling mountain slopes and shooting into valleys. To-day *Night of Destiny* is the greatest production ever undertaken—to-morrow the veriest trash. All hopes, all fears are concentrated on the production. The company's money is flung into its jaws. The company's stock rises and falls on the Exchange with rumours that escape the studio's grilled gate. The production may bankrupt the company or put it on Easy Street. It drives executives frantic, directors to despair, authors to the verge of suicide—and actors toil for it like slaves chained to the galleys. The production is the strongest thing in Hollywood—in a city which does nothing but produce—stronger, oh, infinitely stronger than life itself. The production is the man-eating Moloch, the implacable shrine, the golden calf of the studios.

It was Eisenlohr who finally broke the silence. " First of all," he said, " we've got to get hold of Donka's eunuch, Takus. He knows how to handle her. He'll have to watch her. She mustn't be allowed to leave the studio. She's been sleeping here, anyway, for the last few days. We mustn't give her a minute to herself. I'm at your service. I've got some influence over her. I'll try—I'll even go so far as to promise that I'll keep her so steamed up she won't have a thought in her head except for the film. No one must be allowed to get in to her. We'll have to bribe and threaten our own people to keep their mouths shut. Her maid's reliable and doesn't chatter. I'll take care of the maid. I'll talk to Applequist,

too. We'll have to keep the papers from her and cut the telephone wires in her bungalow. I'll get her drunk or give her sleepfng powders the minute she leaves the set. We still have six days' shooting. That's a long time. If—all right, let's say it—if Oliver lasts that long, I'll do my best to keep Donka here. But if anything should happen to Oliver during that time—then—then I don't know." He ended on a husky, wavering note, having worked himself up as he did for his big scenes.

Bill Turner walked over to him and thumped him on the shoulder. "Good," he said. "Good, good. That's fine, Eisenlohr."

Dr. Erbacher in the rear turned to his neighbour, the young director Brown.

"Can't they see how horrible they are?" he whispered.

"What do you mean?" asked Brown in bewilderment.

"They can't possibly realise what they're doing. On with the production! To hell with the man! Believe me," he said, wiping his damp upper lip, "it's lack of imagination that's responsible for most of the crimes committed in this world."

Donka was still asleep. The one-armed watchman was pacing backwards and forwards, backwards and forwards, outside her bungalow. Manuela stole out to join him.

"Holy Mother of God," she whispered. "What are we going to do? How do you like this awful thing!"

"He'll pull through," the other assured her in a tone of the utmost conviction.

"You think so?"

"Of course. I pulled through, didn't I?" And he gestured with his chin toward the empty sleeve fastened with a safety-pin inside his coat pocket. He walked back and forth, stopped, walked back and forth. It was dark. There were stars overhead—beautiful, brilliant stars. He remembered his days at the base hospital—he knew exactly how it felt to be hacked to bits. It was still so clearly a part of his consciousness that he could all but see Oliver Dent on his sick-bed as he walked back and forth, looking at the stars. He was probably the only person in the studio who knew how it felt.

"Poor Ol," he said, as one comrade to another.

Manuela slipped back into the house. Donka had rung.

It was Granite eventually—the fat casting director, Granite—who suggested a possibility for the leading masculine role in

Milestones. Granite was supposed to know the market better than anyone else in Hollywood, to have the keenest scent for tracking down talent and promising recruits. Which was why Mackenzie promptly abandoned his food and pricked up his ears when Granite stepped over to his table in the canteen and, resting his arms on the back of Mackenzie's chair, remarked nonchalantly: "I think I've found a fellow you can stick into your film in Oliver's place. I've been racking my brains, and I can't find anyone better. It's this Aldens chap."

"Aldens! Aldens! Who's this Aldens chap?"

"Oh, you know him. That young German. You picked him out of a bunch of extras yourself to be Oliver's understudy."

"Me? Haven't the vaguest recollection. When was this supposed to be?"

"In *Cardogan.*"

"Doesn't seem to've made any very startling impression on me, this Aldens of yours. Was he kind of a little, brown-haired guy?"

"Man alive, listen!—would you pick out a little brown-haired guy to be understudy for Dent? Aldens looks just like Oliver. That's the whole trick of it, don't you see?—that's where the stunt comes in. Imagine the effect if we can tell the papers a week after Oliver's funeral—Oliver Dent's Double Discovered. Plays Star Role in Phœnix Picture Corporation's Next Film."

Mackenzie winced. "You're a sweet soul, aren't you?" he jeered. "Granite the Golden-hearted. Oliver's still pretty much alive for the time being, and I'm still counting on him." He attacked his food again. "What else can he do, this Aldens of yours?" he inquired, his jaws working. "An understudy—I can just about imagine. Can't walk, can't talk, plays with two left arms and has an accent like Eisenlohr's."

"All right, take a look at him yourself," grumbled the aggrieved Granite. "I'm not getting any rake-off from him—I was just trying to help you out of a jam. After all, I'm not an utter damn' fool—I've discovered people before, haven't I? And as for Aldens, go ask Eisenlohr about him, if you don't believe me. He knows him—as a matter of fact, it was Eisenlohr who brought him to Hollywood."

"Is that so!" exclaimed Mackenzie, suspending his feeding activities once more—even shoving his plate aside this time. If the fellow were a protégé of Eisenlohr's, this might be worth

looking into. "All right—now what does he really look like, and where's the catch? The truth, now, and don't hold out on me."

"He's a tall, blond kid, no older than Oliver. Of course, you can't expect any patented double, but he's the same type."

"Is he? Has he got that sunny, radiant, Dentish quality? Has he got that?—I ask you."

"He's German—a little heavy, maybe. But, good Lord, what does the great Mackenzie draw his salary for if he can't plump a little sunniness into the guy?"

Brown, who had been shooting dice with Erbacher for the check, threw the box down. "Fellows!" he exclaimed. "When Oliver smiled! In *Cardogan*—remember? Say, you could go scouting round for a hundred years, and you wouldn't find another like him. Oliver's type!—boloney! Oliver was no type—he was happiness personified."

Erbacher regarded him thoughtfully out of the strain-reddened eyes. "I'm not even sure that Oliver was his own type. I mean," he attempted to elucidate, "that he was really the type he represented. Happiness personified—maybe. Myself, I reserve the right to doubt it. Suppose he did smile—what of it? Why shouldn't we be able to reproduce his smile? We manufacture jungles here—towns—wars—Japanese cherry blossoms. Why shouldn't we be able to manufacture Oliver's smile?"

The suggestion was greeted in silence. Erbacher's remarks were invariably of a nature to leave his hearers baffled. He gripped the base of his nose between thumb and forefinger—always a gesture of resignation with him. "My God!" he thought. "Why do I keep saying 'he was'? Why do we all talk of Oliver as though he were dead? It's bad for him. He's still fighting for his life. We ought to be helping him—instead of which we're leaving him flat. . . ."

"Well," Mackenzie concluded, "I suppose it can't do any harm to ask Eisenlohr about the fellow. You might arrange for some tests, Granite."

"Take it easy, old man. *Milestones* doesn't begin for a week yet, does it? I've arranged for the tests, all right. We're making them at seven. Stick around the studio, will you? Bill's going to be there, too." He finally released the chair-back against which his hands had been drumming, to Mackenzie's nervous despair, and took his departure. There was something pompous and complacent about him nowadays. A

mob of Russian patriarchs from *Night of Destiny* was seated near the door, the long grey beards pasted to their faces decidedly effective, but not much help in eating. Granite waved two fingers airily as he strode past—a person of authority and influence.

Yes, Granite—who two weeks ago had been a man undone, at the lowest ebb of his fortunes, dishonoured, dismissed, under orders to vanish from the face of the earth—Granite, was back on the job and riding the crest of the wave. It was one of those pranks with which public opinion beguiles its time. For four days public opinion had flamed high against Granite, and there was no single questionable detail of his private life that had been left unfingered. Newspaper pictures of the wife he had abused—interviews with the pitiful creature—her photograph as a baby—her photograph as a bride in her wedding veil, chubby-faced innocence with lashes upturned. Her life story, told by herself—the story of her unfortunate marriage, in instalments. The newspaper that paid her two thousand for the facts earned ten thousand in increased circulation.

On the fifth day another paper conceived the ingenious notion of starting a counter campaign. Granite's cause was vigorously espoused. Madame Granite's love life was shamelessly exposed, and there was no dearth of material. Pictures of Granite as a youth—a slender, fiery youth who stirred one's sympathies. Pictures of Granite's mother—who had ever supposed the man capable of a mother?—and how well it spoke for him that he had one, in the first place, and sent money regularly for her support, in the second! Snapshots showing Granite as a man crushed—his arms flung across a table, his head buried in them—the caption stating unequivocally that it was Mrs. Granite's love life which had transformed the fiery youth into this hulking, sorrowing wreck of a man. Touching little incidents from his life. Granite—a kindly, open-hearted, trusting baby of a man, dragged through a marital inferno by a wife devoid of honour or conscience. To cap the climax, Granite had declined—despite an offer of ten thousand dollars, absolutely declined to make a single public statement against his wife or about his marriage.

Having been manipulated in this fashion, public opinion eventually ranged itself on Granite's side. Now it was Mrs. Granite who was obliged to flee the country. She took ship for Hawaii, and the P.P.C. recalled the maligned Granite from his so-called sick leave to his job.

Back in his office at the Casting Bureau, he was inclined to be a little bumptious. He had acquired a touch of vanity: he flaunted new clothes and parted his hair, which smelled of *eau fougere*, a little farther to the left. All of which was distressing and pathetic, being merely a smoke screen to hide the mortal injury he had sustained. He was trying to get into tune with himself. He had given up his fruitless reducing treatments and was making daily visits instead to a psychiatrist on Highland Avenue. His work at the studio done, he would lie full length on a creaking chaise-longue of moss-green velvet and trot out his life and his dreams, his covert desires and his flouted hopes. He derived a certain satisfaction from the process. It was like scratching mosquito bites. And though they stung all the more painfully later, when he was sitting in his rooms alone, the external wound seemed to be nicely patched up. He worked in his office, and lorded it over his staff. His secretary decided he was getting a little on her nerves nowadays, and the chorus girls, noting the growing aptitude of his beautiful hands at casual caresses, told each other in the dressing rooms that " that fat Granite was getting to be like all the rest."

After lunch Mackenzie set out for a talk with Eisenlohr about " this Aldens." He made his way through the lot on foot. The heavy clouds that were gathering would have presaged rain anywhere else. But in Hollywood one could be perfectly certain that no rain would fall before December. Palm trees and shrubs stirred gently in the breeze. Mackenzie ran his eye over the newspaper he had bought at the canteen, then thrust it into his pocket. It reported a slight improvement in Oliver Dent's condition. The heart was good—the pulse too. He had slept a little and was bearing his pain uncomplainingly. Mackenzie sighed. Impossible to conceive a sick Oliver Dent—a stricken, uncomplainingly suffering Oliver Dent. But the moment he crossed the section of the lot where the sets for *Milestones* were being constructed, he forgot all about Oliver Dent. Standing on a wobbly bamboo bridge under which no river flowed, he watched the workmen on the opposite shore setting up the Norwegian highway, where the great wedding scene in *Milestones* was to be played. Then he went on, passing through a parched Hindu village that smelled of swamps, and continuing more rapidly along a Montmartre street. The sun shone wanly behind the clouds, as though it were shining through sheets of zinc, and an air of hushed desolation brooded over the abandoned sets of films

dead and gone. Behind a little Mexican town a siren blew. They were shooting *Night of Destiny* over there.

Turning the corner, Mackenzie emerged on a snowy Petrograd street, crowded with people into whose faces misery had been etched by dint of countless red streaks. Their shoulders, their brows and beards were flecked with snow. A little machine kept blowing fresh snow—paper-thin leather shavings that looked disconcertingly real—over the poverty-stricken and the disinherited of the earth, who circled about in top boots and Russian blouses, to make sure that they were being evenly coated.

This was apparently the scene in which a bomb was hurled into the prince's sledge, killing five innocent bystanders. The women and children to be killed were grouped about a young assistant, who was explaining something to them. A sledge, to which three horses were harnessed, stood in readiness at the farther end of the street. Mackenzie caught sight of Eisenlohr standing beside it and, on drawing closer, saw that Donka was seated inside, muffled to the nose in a fur coat—which could not have been much fun on a summer's afternoon in Hollywood. She was talking and laughing with the coachman on the box. Instinctively Mackenzie thrust the crumpled paper, with its account of Oliver's illness, deeper into his pocket. Blakeley, in full uniform, sat smoking at Donka's side. One foot resting lazily on the running-board, Eisenlohr was watching the electricians making their way toward the spots that had been set up on the house cornices. Takus was lounging about behind the sledge. Manuela stood near Donka, holding powder, mirror, and a tall fur cap in readiness. As Mackenzie approached the sledge, he could hear Donka talking to the coachman in Russian. The latter turned back to the horses and, flourishing his whip, addressed them in the same language. But, patient, experienced film horses though they were, they understood only English and Spanish, and their hides quivered under the flick of the lash.

"Hello, Mackenzie," Eisenlohr greeted him. He did not especially enjoy having his rival visit him at work, but he was flattered.

"Hello, Eisenlohr."

"Hello, Mackenzie," called Donka, so deep in her patrician role that Mackenzie had no choice but to kiss the hand she extended. Her face was covered with a thin chalky layer of *eau de lys*, and she smelled of roses and powder.

"What do you think of this light?" inquired Eisenlohr

retfully. "If that damned cloud doesn't pass pretty soon, ve can quit. We're two days behind, as it is."

"Eisenlohr," smiled Donka, "is developing talents as a lave-driver. I've never been so hounded in my life—not even by him. I see that I'll have to sham fainting fits like Ria Mara, if I'm ever to get a moment's rest." She passed her ongue rapidly over her lips. Her accent was more pro-nounced than usual, and it was evident that she was in the best of spirits. "Have you seen our prison scene, Mackenzie?" he inquired. "Have them run it off for you." She placed hree fingers against her lips and kissed them.

Eisenlohr was seized by a sudden frenzy. "Are we ever going to get on with this?" he roared in a voice that could be heard at the other end of the long street, and brought the ombre population of Petrograd swarming up to distribute tself in corners and over steps.

"I'd like to speak to you a moment," said Mackenzie.

"Of course," agreed Eisenlohr, without stirring from the ledge. His eyes were riveted on the Pan-Parabel lamps which vere being used to light up the scene. Donka was powdering er face from the box Manuela held out to her. Mackenzie ooked his arm through Eisenlohr's and drew him away by legrees.

"What about Donka?" he asked. "Doesn't she know et? I couldn't talk in front of her. It's about Oliver's art in *Milestones*."

"No. She hasn't the faintest notion. We were shooting ill five this morning. Then I waited till she fell asleep. I got er up myself at noon and I'm going to drive her till she drops. omeone may have to help me get her drunk to-night. We tart again early in the morning. The whole crew has its nstructions, and anyone who blabs gets fired."

"How do *you* stand it, anyway?"

"Me?" said Eisenlohr, stretching his huge body. "Oh, I nly *look* decadent, you know. I once worked thirty-seven ours without a break. Haven't you?"

"Of course I have," Mackenzie hastened to agree, and pro-eeded to put his inquiry about "this Aldens." Eisenlohr esitated a moment. Aldens had always been his protégé, ut he did not really think much of him. "Aldens is a sham," e thought. "Good-looking front, but nothing much behind . Film front." He glanced around. They had moved off ie set and stood facing its planked backing. Well, he found mself wondering, was not Oliver a sham? Something within

him said, no. Not Oliver. But he could not have produced any reasons for his conviction.

"Aldens"—he echoed—"why, that's a brilliant idea. Aldens—my God, we were in Darmstadt together. He's no ordinary extra, let me tell you. He was a great attraction in Berlin—a real actor. Listen—no one—not even Granite's fool enough to fall for that magazine hokum about the extra who suddenly becomes a star. It's different with Aldens. He's an actor. If you take him—I think you'll have to play him up more from the emotional angle. He's a little sentimental."

"We're all supposed to be sentimental in Hollywood," smiled Mackenzie.

"Exactly. He'll have to get himself a new nose—tell him so. Or I'll tell him myself. For the tests, tell him just to make himself up like Oliver. If he's any good, Patapopoulos'll have to fix him up the right kind of nose later on. Too bad there's no time for it now. Patapopoulos makes magnificent noses. He made Williams' nose, too. And dye his hair. He's got that mawkish blond hair that doesn't photograph—you know—German provincial—and a slight accent still——"

"We're all ready," said an assistant, who came sidling round the corner of the drop. Eisenlohr promptly abandoned both Aldens and Mackenzie. His eyes leaped into action like a motor.

"Let go!" he bellowed in his megaphone voice, and was gone.

The cloud overhead was edged with brilliance, and a hint of sunlight was flickering over the studios. The innumerable lamps with all their facetious names burned above the roofless buildings. Donka had donned her fur cap. The extras were standing, cowering, crouching, motionless against the background—like figures in a tableau. The siren shrieked—and it was as though a penny had been dropped into one of the little peepshows at a fair. With cramped, circumscribed movements, learned by rote, the Petrograd population went into action. At the last moment Blakeley handed his cigarette to a fireman, who crushed it out. The horses drew the sledge into the scene. Mackenzie was halfway to his office when he heard the explosion of the bomb and the wild outcry of the mob.

They worked while the sunlight lasted. Donka was shivering a little when they stopped. In spite of her furs, she was chilled with fatigue. The sun descended swiftly, giving way to a cold dusk.

"I'll drive you back to the bungalow," said Eisenlohr. She was flanked by Takus, like a bodyguard, on the other side. He had been promised a bonus of three hundred dollars if he managed to get Donka safely through the production.

"Damn the bungalow!" she protested. "Donka's tired. Donka would like for once to sleep in her own house again—in a regular bed of her own."

"Nothing doing," smiled Eisenlohr. "You're just playing the prima donna." He felt desperately sorry for her. "You'll sleep where you're put. Climb into the car now, and don't talk back."

"All right. Whatever you say. I'm too tired to argue. Absolutely stiff with fatigue. I'd like to walk, not ride."

"Then I'll walk with you," Eisenlohr agreed promptly. "Much more sensible, anyway," and they moved off together. Smiling to herself, she threw him a swift glance. "What's the matter?"

"Nothing." She was wondering a little whether Eisenlohr wasn't falling in love with her all over again—an agreeable and diverting idea. Dusk was descending rapidly now, palpable as a close-meshed net. The mute, deserted sets through which they were moving, sombre and jagged in the waning light, took on a fantastic quality.

Donka came to a sudden halt. "Pretty," she said softly, gesturing with her chin toward a street at whose farther end a silhouette of the leaning tower of Pisa rose against the sky. "In spite of everything—pretty."

"Yes," replied Eisenlohr. "Isn't it remarkable how we fall head over heels in love with all this flimflam and never get over it as long as we live?"

They had reached the corner of the bungalow-lined avenue. The arc lamps were just flushing up, and a vague, mysterious half-light hung in the air. Just before they reached Donka's bungalow a man came walking rapidly out of the tunnel opposite. Tall and slender and very blond, he was wearing, curiously enough, a dressing-gown—a dressing-gown that looked colourless, yet somehow festive, in the twilight. Donka clutched at her breast and stood stock-still.

"Hello," she called. It sounded husky and strained. Eisenlohr had stopped too, his own heart pounding. He had suggested Oliver Dent too startlingly—this man who had emerged from the tunnel and was walking ahead of them, this man who turned his head as Donka's call reached his ears. He still looked like Oliver—weirdly, appallingly like Oliver

Dent, who was lying somewhere far away at the point of death. Only when he moved closer, smiling uncertainly, only when he drew within range of the vivid light from the nearest lamp, were Aldens' more rough-hewn features discernible under Oliver's make-up.

Donka's hands dropped to her sides, and she heaved a sigh so deep that her coat fell open. "Too stupid," she said, with a forced little laugh. "I thought it was Ol. How stupid!"

"No," said Eisenlohr. "It's Aldens. You know him, I believe?" He had been bracing himself for the ordeal as Aldens—a little hesitant, but smiling happily—approached. Eisenlohr too drew a deep breath to steady his voice. Aldens bowed over the hand Donka proffered. He was wearing beach sandals, but his legs under the dressing-gown were bare. His neck was bare too—excessively naked it looked, where it emerged from the dressing-gown. Donka's expert glance rested fleetingly on that straight handsome neck bowed courteously before her.

"I know the sensation," said Eisenlohr quickly, before Aldens had a chance to speak. "These tests!" He cast a helpless glance at Takus, who possessed himself obediently of Donka's elbow.

"Donka'll catch cold," he said. "Donka mustn't stand round here, getting cold feet." She shook his hand off with a slight movement and surveyed Aldens appraisingly. Her lips were parted in a wondering little smile.

"How do I look?" asked Aldens. "Is my get-up all right?" He opened his gown—he was wearing boxing-trunks—swelled the muscles of his chest and rose on his toes.

"Not bad," said Eisenlohr. Donka's eyes narrowed a trifle with an effect of mockery. She was subjecting Aldens to the same close scrutiny she would have given a horse put up for sale, and getting the same random pleasure from the spectacle.

"Well, I suppose they want to see everything at once, my boy?" observed Eisenlohr. He was seething with nervousness. It was like tightrope-walking, this business, and devilish gruesome.

"It's for a boxing scene. Well, how's the make-up? Do you like my Oliver Dent mask, madame? Not from a photograph, either, but entirely from memory. Good, Eisenlohr, isn't it? I had my hair bleached in less than half an hour—hurt like hell—fire-bleaching, they call it—hope it's going to be worth while."

"Better run along, boy," said Eisenlohr. "You'll catch cold here. I'll take a look at you later. He's an old friend of mine," he told Donka, as they moved on together and he opened the door of her bungalow to let her precede him. "My God, we were in Darmstadt together." She paused for a moment on the threshold, gazing after the receding Aldens.

"What's the idea of the masquerade, anyway?" she asked, smiling.

"You can see for yourself. They need a double for Oliver—for a boxing scene."

"A double—I see. Good-looking rascal," she said and entered the house. Takus switched on the lights in silence, his sombre gaze following her every movement. She flung off her coat and advanced toward the cold fireplace. "I want a fire," she said. "This vampire Eisenlohr's sucking my blood."

Eisenlohr threw her a bland, intimate smile.

"A double for Oliver. Not so easy to find a double for Oliver—what do you think, Takus?" She closed her eyes for a moment, and there was Oliver, plain—as close as though he were painted inside her lids. "Oh"—she cried with a little snort—"what do you know of Oliver, any of you?" She was rubbing her hands in front of the fireplace where no fire burned. Suddenly she broke off, knitting her black brows.

"Funny," she said. "I actually thought it was Oliver, for a moment. Funny."

Eisenlohr moved to the other end of the room and took a book from a shelf. His heart ached with pity for her—Donka, the comrade of so many years, so many struggles, so many films, triumphs, defeats.

"As a matter of fact, you haven't heard from Oliver for a long time, have you?" he asked, his face averted.

"No," she replied cheerfully. "He's not much of a letter writer." Takus, kneeling at the fireplace, managed to draw a faint crackling from the first log he laid. "He may still be a little peeved with me. I think it was my fault that he missed his steamer and didn't get to Europe," said Donka, stooping over the new little smoky flame. Eisenlohr was turning over the pages of a book.

"Have you any idea where Oliver's keeping himself?" he asked, and flattered himself that it sounded beautifully casual.

"Jerry tells me he's trout-fishing somewhere, God bless him," she replied from her place on the hearthstone. "He always did have a taste for idylls." She crossed the room

swiftly and put her hands on Eisenlohr's shoulders from behind. " I want to tell you something," she said. " Oliver's a peasant at heart. And so am I. And as soon as I have enough money and my debts are paid, we're going to get married. Simply go and get married and disappear from Hollywood, and no one'll ever find us again. We'll be peasants and have a little house and a forest and a stream. And I'll cook Rumanian mamaliga and be very fat and ten years older than Oliver, and he'll think I'm the only woman in the world just the same. That was all settled long ago—dear God, you don't know, you don't know, you don't know——" she cried passionately and broke off to walk round and face Eisenlohr. She looked him sternly in the eyes, and he lowered his gaze quickly. " You don't know how we love each other. You don't even know what love means. You don't even believe there is such a thing as—love——" She said the word softly and, having said it, her lips remained parted in a questioning, rapturous smile. Eisenlohr gulped and banged down the book.

" Come, come, come," he said. " You're asleep already. You're babbling in your dreams. The little house beside a peaceful stream and the great love—which of us hasn't sung the same tune? We're seeing visions, Donka. Come—I'll put you to bed and wake you at six to-morrow."

" You'll put me to bed! You'll wake me at six! Who are you, anyway?—my nurse? " But she was speaking from the midst of a yawn, overwhelmingly weary suddenly after an overwhelming day's work. Manuela stood on the staircase and took her in charge.

" Any news? " asked Donka.

" No, madame—nothing," replied the maid.

Eisenlohr was a little out of breath when he reached Stage 5, where the tests of Aldens were being made. A group of silent men stood in the shadows behind the camera. In front, under the harshest of lights, Aldens was doing his utmost. He had a fine, powerful body, and his speech was almost entirely free of accent. He might have been good. He might have been himself—Aldens—a reflective, rather heavy person—a German with a nostalgic soul—one who had known his share of suffering and bore its imprint on his face. But that was not what they wanted.

And so he stood there under the spotlights—with Oliver's hair, dyed to a glittering yellow—with Oliver's profile, made of mastic—with Oliver's smile, the smile that had gladdened all

the world, set like a painted grimace on his face—an Oliver Dent from the five-and-ten-cent-store—a shoddy copy of a priceless original—which was what he was doomed to remain to the end of his days.

"What do you think of him?" Bill Turner whispered to Sam Houston.

Sam shrugged. "Not bad. Better than nothing."

"Donka saw him," whispered Eisenlohr. "She took him for Oliver."

Bill Turner whistled. "Good," he said. "She took him for Oliver?" An odd smile flitted over his care-worn face. "She took him for Oliver! Good. Good. Good. Good."

That word, four times repeated, sealed Aldens' fate.

Though Granite's working day ended at six, he did not leave the studio that night till Aldens' tests had been completed. As he passed through the grilled gate toward nine and crossed to the parking place for his car, he felt he was ready to drop. For a few moments he toyed with the idea of going to Club 111 for a few cocktails—Hollywood's sovereign remedy for depression or fatigue in any form. In the end, however, he made for home. He had not entered his own house since the catastrophe of his marriage, but was living for better or worse in a two-room apartment on Orange Drive. It was one of those average houses, prettily fitted out with average furniture, and packed to the roof with a multicoloured swarm of companions in misfortune: a human hodgepodge which would have been considered odd and bizarre anywhere else in the world, but which in Hollywood merely represented the average tenancy.

"How's Oliver?" asked a girl who had entered the elevator after him. He had removed his hat mechanically at her appearance and gone on reading the evening paper.

"Nothing much new. His heart's good, but he's running a temperature." He read the paragraph to the end, then proffered the girl the open page.

"Thanks very much, Mr. Granite," she said. He threw her a fleeting glance, recalled having seen her somewhere, but did not know her name. She was a dainty little thing—her clothes and make-up a little worse for wear and her young face somewhat marred by a red scar under the left eye.

"My name's Frances Warrens," she said in reply to the dubious glance he fixed on her scar. "I was in your office once."

"Yes?" he rejoined, as the elevator came to a halt. "I get out here. Do you go on up?"

"I live on the sixth," she said. He stepped out, and the elevator continued its ascent.

Granite had a definite reason for wanting to spend the evening in his own two rooms rather than at the club—a reason connected with the psycho-analytical treatments he had been taking. Having scraped divers layers from this adult victim of obesity, the psychiatrist had come upon a number of unfulfilled, if apparently harmless, desires in Granite's childhood. He had advised the patient to gratify these desires now—immediately and without delay—to make up for the things he had missed in former years. Which accounted for Granite's expectant smile as he slipped his key into the lock, removed his coat, turned on his radio, and dropped to the floor to play with an electric railroad. It was a small but accurately contrived railroad, with trestles and semaphores, switches and viaducts, and a track that extended into his bedroom, so that he had to pick his way over it whenever he wanted to cross the threshold. In addition to the railroad, he had bought himself an aquarium stocked with fantails and a toy chemical laboratory—hardly adequate compensation for a shattered marriage and a blasted self-respect. But they helped him to forget both—for ten minutes, given a good evening.

He had been playing thus for about two hours—now genuinely soothed as he fussed over some problem presented by the intricate toy, now plunged into a bottomless pit of futile brooding over a threadbare theme—so that it must have been past eleven when a knock sounded at his door. Since he lived in constant strained expectation that something would happen to his wife, which would either avenge him or bring about a reconciliation, he went quickly to the door and yanked it open, clad in slippers and pyjamas though he was.

The girl who had spoken to him in the elevator was standing outside. She was wearing the same pale-blue dress—not overfresh—and was holding her hat in her hand. Her hair was bleached almost white at the tips, but elsewhere was growing much darker. Granite's trained eyes were quick to note this evidence of dire financial stringency.

"Could you oblige me with a cigarette?" asked Frances. "Mine are all gone. I'll die if I don't get a cigarette."

Granite, who had retreated from the door, ran his eye over the room.

"Sorry," he said. "I have none."

"You don't smoke?"

"I've given it up."

"That takes grit," said Frances. Standing there in the hallway, one hand on the knob of the open door, she seemed to have no intention of taking her departure. There was something listless, inert, neglected-looking about the girl's whole appearance. Granite retreated still farther, reaching mechanically for the button of his collar, which was decorously fastened. Frances' eyes followed him to the threshold of his bedroom. "Then you'll have to give me a drink," she said abruptly. It sounded so brusque that Granite drew nearer.

"What's wrong with you?" he asked coldly. She merely shrugged her shoulders. Granite repaired to his kitchenette, took a half bottle of Chianti from the icebox and returned with it. "There," he said. "Good night."

"I have no glass," said Frances. Still hanging round his door, was she? He withdrew to the kitchenette in a rage and brought back a glass. She tucked bottle and glass under her arm and stood there, looking at him.

"Thanks," she said. "Things get you sometimes, don't they?"

"Yes. I think you'd better go to bed now. It'll do you good. You live on the sixth floor, don't you?"

Frances had not moved. "Yes," she replied. "I did live there," and laughed.

Granite had evolved a perfectly simple, obvious explanation of this girl's presence at his door. Blackmail, he thought—the idea being to come to his room at night, raise hell afterward and drag something out of him—money, marriage, a job. It was the primitive method of extortion in daily use all over America. Granite, who had just weathered one scandal, was on his guard.

"A railway!" cried Frances suddenly, her small face breaking into a childlike smile. "Oh, how adorable!" Before Granite could stop her, she was in the room—on her knees before the trestle. Setting bottle, glass and hat on the floor beside her, she picked up the locomotive. "Do *you* play with this?" she asked, smiling trustfully. Granite walked to the door, kicked it open a little farther, and hooked it back—an explicit measure of precaution which, to all appearances, Frances either failed to see or to understand. She was investigating the interior of the little engine.

" Excuse me," said Granite, and jumped over the track to enter his bedroom, where he began changing rapidly into more conventional attire. Before he had finished, he heard the clatter of the little train over the tracks outside. It had been stubborn and balky for the last fifteen minutes.

" It's running now," smiled Frances as he re-entered the living-room.

" Yes, it's running now," he repeated rather inanely, and stood watching the little train whizzing round the room.

" You're clever," he said, rather more graciously. Oddly enough, Frances' ability to play with an electric railway had done something to allay his suspicions.

" My brothers had one. I've got two brothers. They're at the Virginia Military Academy," said Frances, bringing the locomotive to a halt.

" Shall I go down with you and buy you some cigarettes? " asked Granite. It seemed to him a good way out.

" Thank you. You're awfully kind. Thanks. I'm all right again now. It was just for a moment—do you know the feeling—when it seems you just can't go on? "

" What's the matter with you, anyway? " asked Granite, much more kindly this time. She lifted her face to his and smiled—a mute little smile that told Granite the whole story —a story he had read too often in the faces of job-hunting extras to mistake its meaning.

" Aha ! " he said. " No job."

" Yes—that too. But it's not that alone, by a long shot. The way I look now—naturally I can't show myself anywhere with this thing on my face." Her fingers brushed the scar, which still looked raw and inflamed. " Motor accident. Sounds smart, doesn't it? But it's the very thing that finished me—besides being a souvenir of the most horrible night I ever lived through. I let things slide after that. You sort of flounder round for a while, and then something happens that makes you think it's not worth the agony. And then you just let yourself go. I've given up the idea of the films, anyway. Tell me," she said, with an abrupt change of subject, " do you happen to know Florence? "

" Well," replied Granite uneasily, " doesn't every man in Hollywood know Florence? " He had seated himself in an armchair. Frances, a car in her hand, was still crouching beside the tracks. The hall door was still open too.

" Is she nice? Lots of people say she's awfully nice."

" Yes, she's all right. I don't know her well. The whole

mob sometimes goes over to one of her houses to celebrate—and naturally she's nice then."

"I have her phone number here," said Frances, fumbling half-heartedly about in the shabby *suède* bag that lay beside her hat, and drawing forth a letter which she regarded abstractedly. "My girl friend locked me out, and the only thing she left me was Florence's number. Of course, that's the last resort. My friend writes me that lots of people get straightened out again, even after they've been at Florence's. I don't believe it. Only I don't know what else to do. I have no place to live. It's rotten luck, being locked out this way. May I take a drink now?"

She poured some of the Chianti into the glass and drank it. Mechanically she drew her dress down to cover her feet—it was a gesture instinct with innocence. Granite watched the worn *suède* shoes disappear under the slightly rumpled blue dress. He was not particularly interested in what the girl was saying, but it served to while away the time. There was an odour of perfume in his room—which there had not been for weeks. And as for Frances, she seemed to find talking a distinct relief—it was a soliloquy rather than a recital. She jumped from one thing to another, rummaged about among her painful memories, lapsed into silent contemplation of her hands, then started talking again. After listening for a while, Granite had the feeling that he was watching someone who had fallen into a heavy sea and could not swim, who rose to the top and was pushed under, rose to the top and was pushed under over and over and over again. Once, in the midst of her narrative, he tiptoed to the door and closed it. That was when Oliver Dent's name entered the story. Then he sat down to listen again.

"'Go to Florence,' she writes me," said Frances. "Much obliged for the advice. Kit thinks she's doing the right thing by me, but look where it's landed her. She finally got hold of this bootlegger of hers—started hitting the high spots every night, and so on. Well, a few days ago they were in a down-town speakeasy in Los Angeles, and some shooting started, and two men were badly wounded. Naturally Light—that's Kit's bootlegger—got into a jam. They locked him up, and Kit sat around howling—no money in the house—end of the world. Yesterday one of the mob came round and tipped her off that she'd better blow, else she'd have to appear as a witness. You know how it is—those fellows'd kill her before they'd let her squeal. So Kit packed up and beat it—and

here I am. 'Go to Florence.' Thanks! The apartment's locked, and I haven't got so much as a powder-puff or a tube of cold cream.

"Last week I went to the doctor about this thing under my eye. It was only a scratch at first—then it got inflamed and worried me. 'Should have had it sewn up immediately,' the doctor told me. 'It's a mess now.' Fiddled around with a little iodine and cauterised it and charged me twelve dollars for three treatments. You've got to pay in advance. That finished me. Broke. I had a little money before that. I thought I might be able to save enough to go home. I'd like to go home. I'm from Fairmont, South Carolina. Do you think a girl could ever fit in there again after hanging round Hollywood for a year? I'm sometimes afraid I'll never get back to Fairmont.

"It wasn't easy to save those twelve dollars, either. Oh, I've tried other things—you can take my word for that, Mr. Granite. I'm not one of these girls who gives up at the very start and runs straight to Florence. I had a job as a waitress at a drive-in down on Santa Monica Boulevard. Kit's bootlegger got it for me. It's not the nicest kind of job, you know. I took it the day after that motor accident. I couldn't get a thing in the films, anyway, and besides, I didn't give a hang what happened to me after that night.

"The girls had to wear these tight yellow pants and little caps, and I look vile in yellow. And then this jumping on and off the cars all day and night—and so many men are drunk at night—no, it's not a nice job. I stuck it out from Tuesday to Monday. Had a row with the fellow who did the hamburgers and hot dogs. An old bird, you know, and absolutely disgusting. Not a hair on his head under the cap, and his hands always smelling of onions, and a sort of a dyed moustache. For a while I pretended not to notice when he kept making passes at me, but finally I lost my temper and boxed his ears. I didn't come to Hollywood to be pawed by an old so-and-so at a drive-in. Well—you should have heard the racket! The yelling! The hullaballoo! Who do you suppose he was? A Prince Auersbach or Auersberg—a Viennese or something—an officer—I don't know what all. All right, I'm a Warrens—and if you knew our part of the country, you'd know that the Warrenses are one of the five families that count. I've got my pride too. Prince Auersberg! Well, of course they couldn't use *two* such grand people at *one* hot-dog stand—so I had to quit. Now Kit's bootlegger's

gone, and I can't get another job, not in the worst kind of a hole. What am I going to do?

" What am I going to do now? " asked Frances, interlacing her fingers and gazing moodily up into Granite's face. " When I got upstairs before, and the door was locked and everything in pawn and nothing in my bag but Kit's damned letter—well, I just felt for a minute that I couldn't go on. What *am* I going to do, Mr. Granite? When I walk out of here, when I walk out of your room, there isn't a place—not a single, single place in the whole of Hollywood that I can go to. You're very kind, Mr. Granite, listening to me like this and letting me stay here for a while. I'm awfully grateful. I just want to think over what I can do—and then I'll go.

" I thought Aldens might be able to help me out—it wouldn't have hurt him, either—we were rather good friends for a while. But, oh, no—I'm not even allowed to speak to Aldens. Do you know Aldens? Kind of a tall German? I got him a little peeved once—the night we had the motor accident. It wasn't anything serious, but Aldens made a tragedy of it. Germans have no sense of humour. I called him up next day. ' Sorry, Miss Warrens,' he said. ' Our ways have parted.' ' All right, my lad,' I thought, ' if that's how you feel about it.' But to-day, when I was having such a rotten time of it, I tried him again. He wouldn't have anything to do with me. High and mighty as the Emperor of China. I waited for him outside his house. You should have seen him. Do you know Aldens? The airs he gave himself! ' I have no time for you now, Miss Warrens. They're making tests of me—great secret—star part! ' All puffed up—I'd have liked to stick a pin into him. ' O.K., buddy,' I said to myself. ' You can go to the devil.' We're pigheaded, Mr. Granite, we Southerners. And I'm not letting any Mr. Aldens walk over me. I used to think he was nice.

" Well, all that wouldn't have been so bad. I'd have pulled through—I always have. The thing that's really got me down is this business about Oliver. How can I brace up and keep going and hang on to my sense of humour when Oliver's so sick? It just drives you nuts, waiting around from one edition to the next—eats the heart right out of you. And besides, they never print anything but a lot of lies and junk. I've saved all the clippings—every line—and I can't make head or tail of them. Is he better or worse? It's not possible that Oliver's going to die—it's just not possible, is it, Mr. Granite? " And she raised her interlocked hands to Granite as blindly

and imploringly as though Oliver Dent's fate rested with him. "My God, my God, my God, they can't let him die," she said, letting her hands drop back into her lap and drearily contemplating the open palms.

"Of course, I know there's no earthly sense in worrying yourself sick like this over a person who's practically a stranger. I've told myself that time and time again. But what am I going to do about it? I just can't get his face out of my head —and how dreadful he looked that last night. My God, my God, my God, if Oliver dies, if Oliver dies——

"But you haven't heard the worst of it yet. Kit kept pestering me to go to the newspaper. 'Tell them the story,' she said. 'They'll give you a hundred dollars for it.' I did not want to go. But when Kit gets her mind set on a thing—do you know Kit Dallas? 'Every bootblack in Hollywood,' she said, 'that ever shined Oliver's shoes is writing a story about it. Every waitress at Henry's that ever served him a tomato salad's making money out of it. You've got to go too.' So yesterday she finally dragged me down to the office —she knows one of the boys there. 'Here's the girl Oliver spent his last night in Hollywood with,' Kit bawls out. God, how they stared! 'Good headline!' one of them yelled, grinning like an ape. Then they started pumping me. Nice questions, charming questions, *filthy* questions. Baby this and baby that, and how Oliver acted and what he said and what he did, and so on. It made me feel sick, honestly it did —but I swallowed it. A hundred dollars, I kept thinking, a hundred dollars, a hundred dollars, and so I told them. How he kissed me, and how I'd been in his bedroom, and so on. Finally one fellow said: 'In plain English—did you or didn't you sleep with him?' And I said: 'In plain English—no, because he was sick already that night. But if he'd been well, then I would have slept with him—in plain English. And if he comes back well, then I will sleep with him—in plain English.' You should have heard them guffaw. Then they had one of these sob-sisters there—young but with glasses. She put her arm round me. 'We could make a very sweet story out of it,' she said. 'Delicate and touching. How Oliver Dent took a girl into his house and how gentle and considerate he was——' Mr. Granite, if they'd known how Oliver treated me. Gentle—boloney! But he was sick, and I don't hold it against him. And besides, that's my affair and has nothing to do with it. But, oh, it was hideous!— the things they asked and the things I had to tell them. I

swear to you, Mr. Granite—if you were to say to me now, ' Strip yourself naked '—I swear to you it wouldn't be so bad as what went on in that office. What kind of people are they, anyway?—scissors chained to their desks as though it were a reformatory or something. Well, anyhow, the end of it was that one of them who'd been stirring his brush round and round in the paste-jar finally said he was sorry but they couldn't use the story. I got the impression they'd been razzing me the whole time—just wanted to have a little fun with me. A hundred dollars—would have been nice. And still I'm not sure that a hundred dollars would have paid for it —that half-hour in the newspaper office. Well, anyway, Kit made her getaway before I could give her a piece of my mind. Go to Florence! I want to tell you something, Mr. Granite. You've got to be born common—else it's not worth the agony. Kit and Florence—that was all right. When Kit was broke, she'd phone Florence, and Florence'd send a man around, and Kit would get ten dollars and Florence five, and everything'd be pie. But Florence and me? I don't know. Besides, it scares me so horribly. Kit meant well when she left me the phone number. It's hard to get. Florence isn't in the book, you know. She wrote the number down for me." Once more Frances unearthed the crumpled note from her bag. She read it without seeing it. It was obvious that she knew the note by heart. " ' *Go to Florence. Her number is Granite* O-2365.' Funny," said Frances, dropping the sheet and turning her eyes on Granite. " Granite—like your name. Granite O-2365. Funny, isn't it? "

" Yes," said Granite. " Very funny."

He was gazing thoughtfully down at the girl, who was beginning to interest him. He had been conscious of a slight tingling sensation through his limbs as she talked on and on. She was drinking the last of the Chianti now, sucking at the glass, absorbed as an infant in the process, and Granite watched the young throat swell and gulp. He rose and paced the room, in so far as the toy railway permitted pacing. His curiosity had been mounting with the mounting confusion of Frances' story. He knew a little more about her now, and it was evident that the girl was no blackmailer. She had been having a thin enough time of it—yet a smile had flickered about her lips throughout her recital—which indicated a decent pride. The strain of breeding, of sweetness and soundness—the Warrens in her—still flashed to the surface in a tone, a gesture, a glance. But overlaying it, as a thick

patina overlays cheap currency, was the experience she had gathered in Hollywood, the lowered standards, the jargon, the hardboiled shell, the cynicism, the tendency to slip hopelessly downhill. Granite could picture very clearly that scene in the newspaper office. A little thrill of excitement had stirred his own pulses when the girl spoke of her frustrated night with Oliver. Granite understood the questions, the laughter, the sensations of the newspaper men. He was a man himself. He turned toward her quickly, stepped round behind her, and, with his hands under her arms, raised her from the floor. His nerves quivered a little at the contact, forcing him to a realisation of what he had been missing in living without a woman—with only a green confessional chaise-longue, a toy railroad, and an aquarium for company. Frances put her hat on and picked up her bag.

"Too bad you couldn't use me for *Billy Gets Married*, Mr. Granite," she said slowly. "It would have made things so much simpler."

"I'm sorry. Being a casting director isn't all it's cracked up to be, either, you know. Unless you've got the soul of a butcher or a sadist or an executioner, it gets pretty well under the skin after a while. That everlasting half-starved look from people who want a job and can't get one. Takes all the joy out of life—having one of those processions of three hundred or so file past you and testing them and having to send two hundred and eighty home. I was looking for a one-legged man yesterday—how many one-legged men do you suppose showed up? One of them followed me all the way to Santa Barbara in the train."

"Well, what about me? Why can't I get a job, for instance?"

"You?" He surveyed her out of slightly squinted eyes. Automatically she pulled off her hat and parted her lips, to reveal the glimmering blue-white enamel of her pretty teeth. "You? I don't know exactly. First of all, you're still very awkward. And then, you've got your hair dyed that idiotic colour. The whole effect's wrong. You just don't come off. There are too many kids like you floating around."

Frances stood in the middle of the room, a lost smile on her face. She was swaying slightly, imperceptibly, from within—as a young tree will sometimes sway on a windless day. "Well," she was thinking, "I suppose I'd better go now."

"I suppose I'd better go now," she said. "Thanks a lot for the wine."

There was a moment's silence, as Granite walked over and switched on a bulb behind his aquarium. Green and transparent and drowsy, the fish hung poised in the light.

Granite spoke abruptly. "I really think it would be nicer if you stayed here."

Frances stood where she was for a moment longer, then moved slowly nearer. "What pretty fish!" she said, but it sounded as though she were talking about something quite different. The light streamed through the aquarium and fell on her face. It was a face Granite had not particularly cared for when he saw it first. He liked it better now.

"What was all this about you and Oliver?" he asked.

She shrugged, and tapped a finger against the aquarium.

"I'm planning to go over to Catalina before long—for some new fish. You know they've got boats there with glass bottoms—you can see the ocean-bed. Would you like to spend a week-end with me there, baby?" His finger was tapping against the glass wall now too.

Frances cleared her throat. "I'd love to," she said politely.

"If I'm nice to you and get you a job," said Granite, "will you be nice to me?" His voice sounded thick. Frances threw him a hunted glance, but she managed to smile too. She felt she was behaving well—she was pleased with herself. This sort of thing took plenty of courage. As a matter of fact, she was far more fearful of herself, of her own inexperience, than she was of Granite. Granite was a fat monstrosity, yes—but at least he was businesslike about it—no sentiment—no confusing of issues—that was one good thing.

"Yes," she replied. "Of course. Why not?"

Why not? Granite asked himself. You had to accept the sordid little makeshifts of life when the important things were beyond you. You engaged seven-dollar extras instead of directing great films. You bought yourself haphazard women instead of living with a beloved wife. Sublimation, the psychiatrist called it.

"You're sweet," he said, putting his arm around Frances.

"It's so bright here," she whispered.

The little tracks jingled as they stepped over them to enter the bedroom.

"I've found a good type for the scene at the prison wall," Granite told Eisenlohr next morning.

"What scene? What wall? What type?" inquired Eisenlohr testily.

" For the woman who's chained to Tatiana when they pass along the wall of the prison yard. The girl's good. She's got a real scar on her face."

" You know what she can do with it. I don't give a damn about the scene or the girl or the scar."

" The girl's very good," Granite insisted. " She has this passive quality. And a real scar on her face."

" It'll be the only real thing in the whole film, then," snarled Eisenlohr in derision, gnawing at his menthol cigarette. He was in a savage mood that morning. His big German face looked shrivelled; his whole huge form seemed to have shrunk. He needed sleep, rest, peace of mind. His nerves had reached the breaking-point.

" I've had about enough of this jigging on Vesuvius with Morescu. I give up. Let her find out and go, for all I care," he said listlessly. " To hell with the film. As far as I'm concerned, they can drop the production right now."

Everyone in the studio was nervous and irritable. The strain of the last three days had grown all but unbearable. At ten o'clock an extra had appeared, blazoning the news of Oliver Dent's death. It turned out to be a false report. Bill Turner himself hung on the private wire that connected the studio with the Dworsky Clinic. Oliver was still alive—in desperate straits but still alive. The atmosphere was thick with suppressed mutterings, charged with electricity. Donka alone was serene and cheerful—particularly cheerful that morning and bursting with energy—which made matters almost worse.

She was a prisoner now—in felt boots, a short skirt, and a head kerchief. She felt thoroughly at home in that costume and in the scenes they were working on that day. She sensed her own power. She had what all the others—all these Ria Maras—did not have, the feeling of belonging to the people.

Eisenlohr had removed her from her position of stellar prominence and placed her among the mob. The effect was novel and striking. A long, cheerless, snow-laden wall. Soldiers in sheepskins guarding the convoy of prisoners. And a double line of two hundred people, each pair handcuffed together, being driven past the wall through the prison gate. Tatiana was among them, with nothing to distinguish her from her fellows save a glance when she recognised in one of the soldiers her lover Akim, and a long, long backward look as she continued on her way.

The assistants were lining up the prisoners at the rear. Lengths of black cloth had been stretched across half the set to keep the sunlight from the scene and to create shadows. It was like being under a huge circus tent. Eisenlohr had clambered to the top of a scaffold whence, morose and spiritless, he was issuing directions. In spite of his megaphone, his voice was low. "Napoleon's hoarse," chuckled Donka. She took Williams' cigarette from his mouth, puffed at it once or twice, and replaced it between his lips. She thumped the backs of a couple of men as she pushed past them through the mob. Her shoulders tingled with the joy of being part of the crowd. She greeted a fat old woman in French, then came to a sudden halt, diverted by the spectacle of her feet in their felt boots.

"Morescu! Morescu!" someone shouted.

"Here!" she called obediently, and worked her way to the side of the assistant who had been hunting for her.

"You've got to be handcuffed," he said. "Left or right?"

"Right!" called Eisenlohr, climbing down from his scaffold.

Donka laughed up at him as she put out her hand for the manacles.

"Is that too tight?" asked the assistant.

"No. Make it tighter," she urged. "I want it really to hurt me. You don't mind, do you?" she added, turning to the girl whose arm was being handcuffed to hers.

"Oh, no—not at all," she replied, inclining her head shyly. Donka swung their linked arms back and forth. "Like two ponies, isn't it?" she said affably. "Now, just let me pull you along. You're not to do anything, understand?"

"Yes," said Frances.

Eisenlohr had stepped up and was scrutinising Granite's find. Hm—yes—she did have a scar. She had a scar, and that was all she had. The others did not even have scars.

"Have you been told what to do?" he asked sternly. "You just let yourself be dragged along. You just walk. You're not supposed to be seen at all, understand? You don't even exist, understand? Don't get it into your head that you're going to steal the scene or anything of that sort."

"No," Frances murmured.

"Stick your hair under the shawl. We've got no use for platinums here," he said with mounting ill-humour. Frances threw him a frightened glance as she tucked back a strand of hair. He shook his head, dissatisfied.

"She's got eyes, though," said Donka, as though she had discovered something rather remarkable, and gave Frances a confidential little nudge.

Eisenlohr broke into a sudden bellow. "Who made her up? Who's responsible for this? I distinctly said no make-up. I want faces. Good God, will you never understand? I want faces, not the output of Factor's Paint Works."

Someone appeared as though conjured up out of the earth and wiped a cold grease-clotted rag over Frances' face. By the time she could see again, Eisenlohr was at the other end of the set.

"All ready?" he cried querulously into his megaphone.

"There, there, there, there," murmured Donka. "Careful now."

Frances was amazed to discover that her companion was trembling. The arm fettered to her own was trembling. And as the siren wailed, she felt Donka go limp, collapse inwardly, become in a flash the prisoner they were driving through the prison gate. Shuffling slowly along among the others, Frances ventured a timid glance into Donka's face. It was a strong face—guiltless of make-up—not at all beautiful—only very unhappy. Frances' arm, her body, absorbed the warmth of Donka's nearness. The same odour of camphored cloth—the odour of the Wardrobe Department—enveloped them both, and their steps fell into the same rhythm. There was a nameless intimacy, something sisterly, about this shackled advance upon the camera. Frances did not altogether understand it—she was touched by no more than a glimmer of comprehension—but she felt herself shaken by a sudden gust of tenderness, of sympathy, of love for this woman to whom she had been chained. Her emotion and the piercing limelight and the excitement of finding herself suddenly in the midst of a film-take brought the tears rushing to her eyes. The camera on its black trolley followed them slowly, goggling at them out of its huge black eye. Donka kept looking back over her shoulder till they had passed through the gate, behind which Takus stood, holding a glass of brandy in readiness. She snatched at it with her free hand and tossed it off.

"How about you?" she asked Frances unsmilingly. Frances shook her head in embarrassment. Now that the little scene was over, she wondered why Morescu should be crying. Fascinated, she watched the tears course swiftly down her cheeks, pause for a moment at the corners of her

mouth and flow on, unchecked. "Thanks. No powder," Donka said to Manuela. The siren howled.

"Back!" roared Eisenlohr through the megaphone. "It was rotten! Lousy! Once more!"

It was past one when the manacles were removed. Donka swung the arm into which the iron had bitten. The extras dashed to a table where their vouchers were being distributed and hurried off with them to the cashier's window. Frances attached herself to the crowd. Eisenlohr, one eye on Donka, who was wrangling in Spanish with the distracted Manuela and accordingly well employed, hunted gloomily about for Takus.

"I'm all in, Takus," he said. "I've got to relax for an hour. Keep an eye on her while I'm gone." Takus groaned in reply. Eisenlohr jumped into his waiting car and drove off, leaving the other to follow Donka to the bungalow as rapidly as his shambling gait would permit.

Donka had gone straight to her dressing-room to remove her costume.

"What's Madame doing?" Takus asked the maid who emerged with an armful of wearing apparel.

"Bathing," replied Manuela, and descended to the kitchen.

"Can I do anything for you?" he called in softly.

"Yes. Shake me up a couple of decent cocktails." She was combating the strain of overwork with daily increasing doses of alcohol. Takus listened for a moment to the sounds of splashing, then followed Manuela to the kitchen.

Donka luxuriated for a while in the hot water. She poured bath salts into her palms and watched the tiny crystals dissolve. She bent a severe gaze upon her knees, which she did not like—they were not to be compared with Oliver's. Then, singing softly, she stepped out of the tub and went to the door. Naked and dripping, she leaned over the banisters. "Don't use any gin," she called down. "Brandy—and angostura"—and strolled back, humming, to the bathroom. She turned on the cold shower, puffed out her cheeks, and stepped under it. The chill downpour took her breath away. She turned it off, pulled a towel from the rack, and started rubbing herself dry, humming as she walked back and forth, and noting with mild pleasure the traces left on the tiles by her wet, beautiful arched soles. She passed into the dressing-room, and not until she was seated at the mirror did she become conscious of the fact that a girl was standing in the doorway, staring at her.

She recognised her next moment as the little super whom

she had been hauling about with her all morning. The girl was dressed and made up now in the accepted fashion of supers, and cheapened accordingly. She was holding out a cluster of yellow roses, apparently dumb-struck. Donka, who had forgotten that she was stark naked till she caught sight of her own arched, gleaming wet body in the mirror, found the situation so irresistibly comic that she burst into laughter.

"Come right in," she called. "Don't be shy. This is just a dressing-room like any other." She reached for the old make-up robe with its faded, rust-red flowers and wrapped herself casually in its folds. Frances extended the hand with the roses—a bunch of those cheap roses, full-blown by the heat, which are hawked at the studio gate. In a spontaneous outburst of love and admiration and sympathy for Morescu, she had run straight from the cashier's window to buy them with the first money she had earned for weeks.

"Here," she said awkwardly, thoroughly abashed.

"Flowers? For me? From you? How charming!" The eyes she turned on Frances were friendly, if expectant. "Do you want me to do something for you?" she asked at length, since that seemed the obvious thing. Frances shook her head, moved her lips, but found speech impossible. "You've been a very brave girl," said Donka. She laid the flowers on the dressing-table, rose, and walked over to Frances. "A very brave girl," she repeated, and with one of those forthright gestures peculiar to her, she took Frances' face between her hands, lifted it, and kissed her swiftly on both eyes.

It was that—that unexpected, sisterly little caress, that "You've been a brave girl"—which unnerved Frances. A brave girl—God knows she had been a brave girl from the moment she had left Fairmont to come to Hollywood. She had kept and guarded her worthless little innocence, her stupid little dream of Oliver Dent, as one might carry a burning taper through a stormy night. She had not cried when they had both been quenched—no, she had not cried, and she had not made a fuss, and she had not stopped using mascara or making jokes. She had been a brave girl. She had not fainted when the false news of Oliver's death had arrived that morning, and she had done her film job well, despite the ugly night with Granite that lay behind her.

Even a nobody like Frances Warrens had been bold enough to start out with the dream of becoming a star—something great, like Morescu. But that was a thing of the past. She had reached the point now where she felt herself beholden to a

man she despised because he had paid for her surrender with a seven-dollar job. She was like a cheap little watch that ticks and goes, long after its springs have been broken. She had been a brave girl and had not cried—not for a whole year. But now, suddenly, in the warmth of Donka's kindness, in the friendly proximity of her body, with the pungent, tepid, fern-scented vapours drifting in from the bathroom, she collapsed and wept. She dropped against Donka's shoulder, simply let herself go, and wept stormily all over the old make-up robe, smelling of the grease and paint and film odours of many years. The situation struck Donka as slightly idiotic.

"There, there, there, there," she said, patting Frances' neck. "What are you weeping about?"

"About Oliver," sobbed Frances, so chokingly that Donka did not immediately catch the words.

"About Oliver. About Oliver. About Oliver. About Oliver."

About Oliver! Donka pushed the girl from her, held her off with both hands and searched her face.

"What's Oliver to you?" she asked softly but sternly. Her arms were all gooseflesh, every tiny hair and nerve bristling. It was the old, familiar—oh, so very familiar—sensation of jealousy. From the tangle of tears and sobs another answer came floating to the surface.

"Because he's still alive. He's still alive. He looked so wretched that last night. He was sick even then—but he's still alive," she sobbed.

Donka's hands dropped to her sides. "Stop crying," she said impatiently. "Stop crying!" She shouted it this time, raising her fist. And Frances actually did stop crying. She drew her handkerchief from her bag, blew her insignificant nose, and dried her face.

"Now," said Donka, conscious of the fact that she was rapidly growing furious, "would you mind telling me what this is all about?" Another long, quivering sob. Then, struggling for composure, Frances made an effort at coherent speech.

"Don't be angry," she said. "I admire you so, Madame Morescu. I—before—the way you were acting—I admire you so—to be able to act like that when Oliver's dying."

She paused, checked by a slight movement of Donka's hand. With a little intake of breath she stared the other straight in the eyes, as timid children in a sudden access of boldness will sometimes stare at their elders. Suddenly Donka was

advancing upon her. For a moment it looked as though she were about to strike her.

"What are you babbling about? What rot are you talking? Are you crazy?" She spoke so softly, so menacingly, her lips so close to Frances' face, that the girl recoiled. Fumbling about once more in the spotty *suède* bag, she produced a crumpled new bulletin.

"There," she said, half defiant, half intimidated, laying it down on the dressing-table among the jars of cold cream and the tubes of paint. "There. Maybe you haven't seen the noon edition."

Donka's eyes went from the paper to Frances' face and back again to the paper. Finally she picked it up, and began reading.

Torn between resentment and distress Frances stood watching her. Her heart felt a little lighter now that she had had her cry out. She wanted to use her lipstick, for she felt that her face had been ravaged by tears, but she did not quite dare. Donka was still reading—reading the bulletin's few lines for the third time.

OLIVER DENT POSITIVELY STILL ALIVE

The report of Oliver Dent's death, appearing in another newspaper this morning, proves to be false. Oliver Dent is still alive. To-day's bulletin, issued at 10 a.m., states that he suffered a heart attack during the early morning hours, from which he has since recovered. His condition is grave but not hopeless. No fever. Pulse weak.

The room was so still while Donka was reading that you could hear a petal break from one of the overblown yellow roses and drop to the floor—then another. Frances made a tentative movement toward the flowers to arrange them to better advantage. They were fading too quickly. But she checked herself as Donka turned, and with a little thrill of terror noted that her eyes had rolled round in her head so that only the whites were visible. Next moment, however, they were normal again, except that the pupils kept dilating and contracting. It looked eerie and a little mad.

"I'm sorry——" Frances began.

"Will you please be kind enough to go now?" There was a senseless courtesy in the request, worse than any outbreak. Frances slipped from the room without a word, leaving Donka alone with her mirrored image and the newspaper.

Donka took a safety-pin from a little cushion and fastened her gown together over her body, still fresh and damp from the bath. She did not faint. Neither did she make any outcry. She did not even weep. She dropped her face into her palms for a moment or two—it was dark and quiet in there—and she tried to think. Her thoughts were of nothing and of everything at once and of all sorts of irrelevancies, till at length her knees sagged and she dropped into the chair before the mirror. She smiled apologetically at so much weakness, and knew nothing more till she found herself staring at her face in the mirror. Finally she picked up the paper again and read it through slowly once more. She turned the sheet over, but the reverse side was blank, only the shadow of the print visible through the inky pulp.

She was still seated at the mirror when Applequist appeared in the doorway.

"Is the table to be set outside or indoors, madame?" he asked.

"What? Outside, if it's not too hot," she replied, staring at him blindly. "Set a place for Mr. Eisenlohr, as usual." As usual. It was insane—wildly, impossibly insane, that everything should be going on as usual while something was happening to Oliver. "Please close the door," she called after the retreating Applequist. He felt an uncomfortable sensation in his shoulder-blades. Donka rose, with a little difficulty, and began hunting in her wardrobe for a dress that Oliver liked. "I've got to go to him right away." It was the one fixed point to which in her mental turmoil she kept returning.

Ten minutes later, in a warm-looking, yellowish street costume, her wet hair smoothly brushed, she descended the stairs, carrying gloves and bag and looking extremely correct. Takus, who had posted himself like a sentinel at the fireplace, dashed forward and seized the cocktail shaker.

"Yes," she said gratefully, quickly draining the glass he handed her.

"Right?" he inquired.

"A trifle too sweet." She held out the glass to be refilled. Her eyes were no longer green. They were perfectly transparent and colourless as water. Takus noted the fact uneasily.

"What's happened to Oliver?" she asked.

"Oliver—what do you mean—darling?"

"I mean—is he going to die?"

Takus felt as though he had been suddenly set down in the midst of an earthquake. He blinked feebly. "What do you

mean?—I don't know," he mumbled inanely. "Who's been talking to you?"

The room, screened against the sun's glare, was rather dark. Applequist was visible on the little terrace outside. A napkin in his hand, he was laying the table, holding each glass up against the light before setting it down.

"They've been keeping it from me. Why? Were they trying to spare me? I'm not the kind of person who needs to be spared," said Donka softly. It was horrible that she should not be making a scene. She had staged many a magnificent scene during the years that Takus had known her. But she staged no scene now. He stared at her in dismay, managing to keep his upper lip steady, though the heavy lower lip began trembling.

"God in heaven, Donka! Spare you! Who thinks of sparing anyone in this place? It was a question of the production, don't you see?" He fell silent, his eyes riveted on her. She did not answer immediately. Then she nodded. "Yes. Of course. The production," she said sensibly, and drew on a glove.

"Is there any mail for me? Have you been keeping the mail from me?"

"No," replied Takus. She looked at him. He withdrew to the little anteroom where his coat hung and brought her three telegrams. They were all from Jerry. Two were identical. He had addressed one to her home, the other to the studio.

CONDITION UNCHANGED, MR. DENT CALLING FOR MORESCU. JERRY.

CONDITION UNCHANGED, MR. DENT CALLING FOR MORESCU. JERRY.

The third telegram was a little differently worded:

CONDITION UNCHANGED. CALLING CONSTANTLY FOR MORESCU. COME AT ONCE IF POSSIBLE. JERRY.

"That one came to-day," whispered Takus guiltily. Donka stood with the telegrams in her hand, staring into space. Applequist glided past, carrying a tray of bouillon cups, and vanished through the door opposite.

"I think Applequist uses rouge," said Donka. She could not—she simply could not concentrate. Everything kept floating away—there was nothing she could hold on to.

Come at once, at once. If possible. If. If possible come at once. Don't be stupid. Oliver. If possible. At once. If——

"Luncheon is served, madame."

"Thank you, Applequist. I tell you he's rouged I know rouge when I see it. He's probably been watching too many butlers in the films."

"Shall I see about getting tickets for the *Chief*?" asked Takus, who was finding that twisted smile of hers unendurable. "You'll want to leave to-night."

"To-night—what do you mean? Yes. See about the tickets. What's Jerry talking about?—at once. Doesn't he know I'm in the midst of a picture? I've got to speak to Oliver myself. Have you the phone number? Please have me connected at once. I've got to speak to him at once."

She went out to the terrace, leaving Takus alone among the shadows of the room. He saw her standing under the awning outside, stirring her iced bouillon with the little round spoon and drinking it as she stood there, utterly oblivious of what she was doing.

"How does she think she's going to speak to Oliver?" he muttered, goaded to exasperation. The request indicated such an utter lack of understanding of the situation as to paralyse his faculties. And there was Eisenlohr now, coming through the little anteroom—Eisenlohr, refreshed by a shower, and rubbing his hands with a show of well-being.

"Well," he called as he entered, "is the humble repast ready?"

Takus regarded him silently, almost scornfully, before walking up to him.

"She's found out," he whispered, nodding three times. His heavy lip dropped. Eisenlohr stared without a word. Before he had quite taken it in, Donka appeared from the terrace—apparently on the point of departure, with her bag and gloves, yet wrapped in an air of utter abstraction. Curious that the two men should have turned on their heels to face her as she passed. It looked like a little ceremony of salute.

"I'm not really hungry," she said politely, without looking at them, and mounted the steps. "I'm going to lie down for a moment," she said. "When you get Oliver on the wire put the call through in my bedroom." The staircase creaked as she ascended.

"Donka!" cried Takus, aghast. "Don't you know you can't talk to Oliver? Darling! Don't you understand?

He's very ill—*very* ill—don't you see?" He was talking in Rumanian, as she had done.

"Just you take care of the connection, and leave Oliver to me," she called down, still quietly, from above.

"So long," said Eisenlohr. "So long, *Night of Destiny*. Now we can all go home." He picked up a bronze Buddha from the desk, and for a moment he seemed about to relieve his feelings by hurling it with a crash to the floor. Finally, however, he replaced it carefully on its base, where the divinity continued to sit in his copper-rusted, rather vacuous, tranquillity.

"So long, Morescu," he said. "So long, film. So long, money. I'm going to Bill."

Hollywood is a light-hearted town, a remarkably gay town, one of the gayest on this excessively jolly planet of ours, which, if the truth were told, should have outlived its wild-oat days by now. Such pretty streets and houses, populated by such good-looking creatures, and aglitter with lights that sparkle more brilliantly than anywhere else on earth. There are people eating and drinking and dancing and playing and laughing and loving all over the place, to the accompaniment of a hundred jazz bands. Their very work has the air of being sheer pastime. The world's sense of humour seems to have been sharpened since the war. People no longer weep. And what indeed could a war generation possibly find important or tragic or worthy of tears? Tears have been abolished, and those who do break down go about the business quietly and considerately. Laughter is universal. People crack little jokes about great sorrows. The surface glitters with irony and polished frigidity, and we neither know nor care what goes on within. It is nobody's business. Nobody troubles his neighbour, and grief has never been so silent as it is to-day.

The one-armed watchman crows his optimistic confession of faith every morning: "What a wonderful day!" and nobody asks what he suffered before reaching that goal. Take even Bill, for example—the mighty, the imperturbable Bill Turner, head of the Phœnix Picture Corporation. He, too, has his sore spot. Bankruptcy looms over the P.P.C., and it is not for the sheer fun of the thing that the studio hums with that feverish activity which takes its way over dead men's bodies. Or take Joey Ray, the sweating, ambitious little fellow in the Publicity Department. He, too, has his harrowing secret. He robbed the cash register of Abeles' Department Store in

Lundenburg, Moravia, when he was sixteen, and not until he returns as a millionaire will be be able to uproot that memory. Even a shadow like the red-haired Miss Smith may be one of fate's victims. Old and faded though she looks, she has a mother who is still young and blooming. There is a step-father at home—a gross hunk of masculine virility—bought for a consideration and humoured to the top of his bent. Miss Smith is condemned to love this despicable intruder, and thinks of him incessantly as she enters Eisenlohr's directions submissively in her working script. And Eisenlohr himself—the giant—divorced for nine years and forbidden to see his little daughter in Europe. Sometimes, when he is very tired and the motor that works so furiously within him has run down, he sits in desperate loneliness over a few letters in a laboured childish hand which he knows by heart. No, we do not know what is going on inside. We are not our brothers' keepers.

We know nothing of Frances, the little super, through whose stupidity Donka learned of Oliver Dent's illness—a stupidity which may cost hundreds of thousands, and plunge the P.P.C. into bankruptcy and ruin. The whole studio's buzzing and crying and whispering that " Morescu's found out," and excitement runs almost as high as it did on the day that brought the first tidings of Oliver's illness.

Frances had been sent packing without delay. Granite had attended to the job himself, relieving his feelings in a torrent of abuse. They ended by putting her on the black list. There was not much they could do to revenge themselves for the mischief she had caused, but it was enough to ruin her. She left the studio—a rather shabby little girl with a scar on her face, and a mouth that had four corners—two painted ones that turned up, and two real ones underneath, that dropped like those of a child who is trying not to cry. She walked aimlessly for a couple of blocks, then turned in at a drug store and seated herself at the counter for a ham sandwich and an ice-cream soda—since she had earned ten dollars and spent only fifty cents thus far on yellow roses. Closeting herself in a telephone booth, she rummaged about in the spotty *suède* bag for a slip of paper, which she smoothed flat. She took the receiver from the hook. " Granite 0-2365, please," she said in a low voice. It was Florence's private phone number.

And that is all we know.

We do not know what Donka Morescu was doing and feeling and thinking that afternoon as she lay on her bed, waiting to be connected with the Dworsky Clinic. She had

a long time to wait, for the P.P.C., as we know, had had her wires disconnected, in their futile endeavour to isolate her from the outer world.

She had a long time to wait, and she lay there, waiting—not crying—only thinking. She was probably thinking of Oliver—we do not know that she was, we can only surmise it—thinking of that great, great love—of the miracle of that love which had come to her at a time when her fortunes had sunk pretty low. She thought of Rhodes and of Pasadena, and she thought of Paris—of her enemy, Ria Mara, too—and then she thought of her own life. She probably had time to think of her own life that afternoon—composed, when all was said and done, of a series of catastrophes. After every climb, a setback; after every joy, a tragedy. She had achieved nothing for which she had not been obliged to pay the piper. She was still hoping that Oliver would live, knowing all the time that things did not turn out so mercifully in this world. She had been buffeted all her life, and was even now bracing herself against the next blow. She was thinking of herself, too, egotistic and calculating. She was thinking back over the torment of the last two years without an engagement—the strain of anxiety, the drudgery, the debts, the decline. The smell of the dilapidated little *pension* in the Rue Pigalle. She could see the stains on the flowered hangings at which she had stared while she was practising: "An Austrian army awfully arrayed"; and then, a tone higher, "An Austrian army awfully arrayed." At midnight or thereabouts, the baroness next door would knock at the wall with a petulant plea for quiet. Her jewels sold, her furniture pawned, debts, usurious rates of interest, mortgages eating up her property. Often, during those days in Paris, it looked as though the end had come—the bleak, hopeless, bitter end. Then came the turn. Then came *Night of Destiny*. She was thinking of the film now—of the film and of nothing else. Her great opportunity, her last opportunity, her only opportunity. So completely did she lose herself in thoughts of the film that she all but forgot Oliver. She was even conscious of something like a lurking sense of resentment against him—that he should have done this thing to her now—that he should have chosen just this moment to fall ill—this moment which was to determine the course of existence for her once and for all. For her everything depended on this film—everything, everything, everything. "Jerry's an idiot," she thought. It relieved her a little to turn her anger against Jerry. Come at once. Idiotic.

"But, no, Oliver," she thought. "I *am* coming. Immediately. Wait for me. I *am* coming. I am coming to get you. Don't be stupid, Oliver. I'm here. You need me—I know. Thank you for needing me, Oliver. Thank you, Puyu—I'm coming, child——"

The telephone rang. New York. Long distance for Madame Morescu. The New York operator. The Hollywood operator. The Dworsky Clinic operator. The P.P.C. operator. So many voices in between, the humming, the distance, the breadth of a huge continent. "Yes, this is Morescu. Donka Morescu. I want to talk to Mr. Oliver Dent. I can't? All right, then let me talk to his doctor. I'll wait."

Waiting. Heartbreaks. Waiting.

The assistant doctor. Then the physician in charge. Finally, Dworsky himself. Donka fought her way forward, step by step.

"Yes, the patient was calling for you yesterday," said the doctor's voice, very close and clear and stern. "I should advise your coming here. What's that? You want to talk to him? But that's impossible. No, no—I don't forbid it—not at all. But you seem to have a false conception of the situation. You can talk to him, but he won't hear you."

"Is he dead?" Donka screamed into the phone.

"No, but unconscious. Yes, he's very weak. No, no change. Hope? Naturally. While there's life, there's hope. His heart's holding out wonderfully. Very well. I'll have you connected with his room. I should advise your coming here at once, then. Good-bye. I'm having you put through to Room 168."

Dread. Dread. Dread.

The nurse. A lengthy parley. Then Jerry. "Thank God, Jerry—a familiar voice at last. How is he, Jerry? What did you say? Have you a cold? Your voice sounded so—— Yes, yes, I know, Jerry—but I've got to try to talk to him—yes, Jerry, just try. No, I know he's weak. Jerry, listen—put the receiver close to his ear—go ahead, try it, will you? Now—yes."

"Oliver!

"Oliver! Oliver! Oliver!

"Oliver, can you hear me!"

Nothing. Humming on the wire. Ticking on the wire. The whole, wide world contained within the sound of that wooden ticking.

" Puyu, do you hear me? Puyu—child—Oliver——"

Nothing. Nothing but dread. Nothing but the ominous pounding of her heart. Buzzing on the wire. Buzzing in her ears, in her temples—the whole universe full of that wordless buzzing.

And then a voice—so far away—from another planet. Not Oliver's voice, but the high, singing, broken voice of a child:

" Don—ka——"

" Oliver—I'm here—can you hear me? Oliver—I'm coming to you—soon—very soon. You must wait—I'm coming—I'll make you well—you mustn't be sick, do you hear me? Do you understand me?"

" Don—ka, Don—ka——"

" Oliver, you're going to get well—I want you to get well, do you understand? Donka *wants* you to get well—you must want it, too. Yes, I'm coming to you. I'm kissing you. Go to sleep now, Oliver. Are you in pain? Where does it hurt? Child—child—Puyu—I won't let it hurt—is it better now when I talk to you?"

Silence.

" Yes—Don—ka——"

" Do you see, Oliver—do you see, child?" (No sobbing now, no sobbing.) " Everything's going to be all right. You must have a little patience with Donka—a little patience. I love you—we'll go back to Rhodes as soon as you—— Operator, I'm still talking—don't cut me off. Operator—Oliver, Oliver, Oliver—oh, Jerry. Do you see, Jerry?—he *was* conscious. He talked to me. Take good care of him, Jerry. Yes, I'm coming. Tell him—tell him to wait—— All right, operator—you can disconnect now."

No, no one knows what went on in Donka's Morescu's mind after that conversation. No one knows what counsel she took with her own heart, no one knows what determined her final decision. She was a human being like any other—the least warped, the most complete human being in Hollywood, perhaps. But there was business—the prodigious idol that devours human beings, leaving nothing but husks and refuse behind. The film here, and life there. An important piece of work here, and a great love there. But the sawing and the bellowing and the screaming of sirens, the rattling and the stamping and the driving pursuit of activity—all that was here. Activity is the home of all humanity nowadays. Activity was Donka's home. And the other—out there—was only the faint voice of a soul already turning to go. . . .

When Bill Turner knocked at Donka's door soon after five, he found her at the mirror. Her face was coated with grease, half of it covered with the mat, hard yellow of her make-up. He thought she was removing the make-up in preparation for departure. But Eisenlohr, peering over his shoulder, realised the truth.

"Donka," said Bill, standing before her with his eyes lowered. "I'm sorry we played this farce with you. You won't understand, perhaps. But it was a question of the production—the money—all the people depending on it——"

"It's all right, Bill," she said gravely, continuing to make up her face. "I know—the production." She picked up a dab of brown paint on the tip of her middle finger and rubbed it into her eyelids.

"If we work day and night and take all my scenes first—when can I go?" she asked.

Eisenlohr emerged from the background. "Two days and a night," he replied, and held his breath.

"Very well. Let's get started," said Donka.

Only Eisenlohr noticed that her voice had dropped back a full quarter.

The company had its hands full during the week that Oliver Dent lay dying. They could not get hold of enough prints to supply the overwhelming demand for Oliver Dent pictures. All over America the houses that were showing *Cardogan* were packed to the roof, and even the oldest and streakiest of the Dent films were drawing audiences in the small towns and suburban theatres. The whole situation had reached emergency proportions. Oliver Dent's ebbing existence was proving a source of considerable revenue. Telephone and telegraph companies, railroads and newspapers, writers and reporters, Press photographers and messenger boys, florists and dealers in souvenir postcards, and the drug stores in the vicinity of the Dworsky Clinic, all found their business improving. Jerry received stacks of advertisements daily, as well as visits from black-garbed gentlemen who put in bids for the funeral arrangements. The members of the Press installed themselves in the waiting-room, much as they might have taken up their quarters behind a battle front. On the fourth day Dworsky threw them out, for their cynical jargon, their tobacco smoke, their uproar, jarred the hygienic hospital atmosphere, and the pyramids of empty bottles they left behind them struck an unseemly note. Imperturbably cheer-

ful, they trooped out, and took possession of Liggett's Drug Store across the way. The drug store had already cleared its windows of rubber stockings and prophylactic mouth washes, to make room for a display of laurel-wreathed pictures and souvenir postcards of Oliver Dent. Now it went a step farther and kept its doors open all night, to provide the reporters on duty with shelter, sandwiches, and an opportunity for poker. The sidewalk was never free of its little group of murmuring figures, gaping up at the windows of the Clinic. Oliver Dent lay dying behind one of those windows. And they stood and stared and argued as to which window it was.

Oliver Dent lay dying behind one of those windows. There was no longer much room for doubt on that score. He lay flat on his back, breathing carefully, his eyes closed most of the time. Only the occasional twitching of his upper lip, of his finger-tips on the counterpane, indicated that he was suffering —a suffering to which he was all but insensible now, for he had travelled a long way on the road he was going, and there was nothing about him to suggest the startlingly hale and vivid Oliver Dent, who laughed and was loved nightly on a thousand screens.

And yet, unconscious though he was most of the time, it was not as though he did not realise how things stood with him. He had moments of such complete lucidity as he had never yet known. Sometimes—generally just before daybreak—between three and four—he would find himself returning from the dark borderland of his wanderings to Room 168, aware of everything. He would hear the ghostly little noises made by the furniture that stretched itself when no one was looking—he would hear a drop of water clicking from the tap into the wash-basin. So wide awake was he that he could hear the all but inaudible sound of a fly changing its position on the window-pane. Ships hooted in the harbour. What harbour? he thought painfully. Ships hooting and sailing for Europe. Thinking was terribly difficult, but he managed finally to discover where he was. It was a discovery that would have made him smile, if his mouth had not been dry. They no longer gave him anything to drink, and that was agony. He spent many hours of the day straying in the desert while he was unconscious. When he opened his eyes—which necessitated a tremendous effort—he could see and recognise various objects. A white cloud hovering about the bed—that was the nurse. She had hands that sometimes felt good, but more often hurt. She made too much noise when she walked. Oliver was afraid

of her. Jerry was around, too. He would flutter up to the bed and away again, smelling of lavender. When Oliver woke at dawn and started out on his little tours of discovery, he would find Jerry asleep in an armchair, his head resting aslant against the white antimacassar. Oliver was very sorry for him.

"I'm going to die," thought Oliver, "between three and four to-morrow. What is that—to die? Suppose I am going to die. I'm ready. I'm ready," thought Oliver—thought it or did not think it—sensed it, perhaps, in the faint, weary beat of his heart, in his reluctance to go on breathing and suffering pain, in his almost joyous readiness to stop. The very ill wait for death as a man who has taken a potent sleeping powder waits for sleep. "I'm ready," thought Oliver. "Ready. Ready."

Strange, how easily a man like Oliver Dent allows life to slip from his grasp. It was a life which had given him all that the human heart desires—a life of the finest quality, so to speak—high on the topmost pinnacle. Youth, beauty, vigour, love, wealth, success. "Well, what of it?" thought Oliver on his death-bed that morning, in that wakeful hour between three and four. "Well? What of it? If what I've had is all you can get out of life—then life's nothing to get excited over. It's no great shakes—life. I was happy? Suppose I was happy—sometimes. Never for long. No one can be happy for long. But everyone's happy sometimes. The longshoreman's happy and the insurance agent's happy and the cockchafer's happy. Everyone's unhappy sometimes. Everyone's indifferent most of the time. Life's nothing to get excited over. I'm ready."

Dworsky was severe with his patient. He shook him by the shoulder, probed the wound, changed the dressings, bawled orders into his ears, deprived him of morphine, injected vitalising substances into his veins. To Dworsky, dying under any circumstances was sheer weakness of will and lack of character, and he was ruthless with those of his patients who were dangerously ill, treating them like deserters caught in the act. When Oliver would be climbing blissfully up to the Lindos Acropolis on Rhodes—along a path bordered by red anemones, Donka's hand in his—Dworsky would drag him rudely back to stick a needle into one of his veins or administer an intravenous injection with glucose. He refused to allow the patient to lapse into unconsciousness—he forbade him, forbade him peremptorily to die.

" You mustn't take things so easy, my boy ! " he would shout through the dull roaring in Oliver's ear. " Hang on ! Stay here ! Watch your step ! "

Thus appealed to, Oliver would return to his post and make an effort to hang on. With consciousness came two pangs of searing pain. One was the wound. The other was longing for Donka.

How he missed Donka, how he missed her, how he missed her, how he missed her ! If anyone could help him, it was Donka—healthy Donka, vital Donka, always ready to hurl herself into a battle. Her step, her walk, her eyes, her voice, her laughter—the sheen of her skin, the crackle in her hair—sparks, electricity, waves of love and strength. Donka, Donka, Donka.

Oliver's love for Donka during those last days was pure and fine and free of dross. Come, Donka—help me, Donka—stay with me, don't let me die, Donka.

Once—it was the day of his bad heart attack—Donka came to him. She called him. She drew him out of his state of deep unconsciousness.

" Oliver, can you hear me ? "

Yes, he could hear her, he could answer her. He hadn't talked since the anæsthesia, and his voice was no longer his. There were mists between him and Donka, but he could hear her, he could answer her. True, she had left him again, but he was waiting for her now. His heart was beating again. He was breathing valiantly. He lifted his hand from the counterpane. He was probably going to get well, since he could do things that required so much strength.

Dworsky praised him when he made his evening call. " Well done ! " he shouted into his ear. " Fine ! Splendid ! The pulse is better. We're doing nicely."

Oliver was waiting for Donka.

A woman came in next day. He realised she was not Donka, but he did not know who else she might be. She was a black woman. He closed his eyes so as not to see her. She sat down at the bedside—causing him excruciating pain in the region of his wound—and wiped his forehead from time to time with a perfumed handkerchief. He knew the woman, he knew the handkerchief, he knew the perfume. He knew that he did not like any of them. He begged the woman, in a lengthy, courteous speech to leave the room. The perfume choked him. He could not bear her whispering. He had a high regard for the lady, but he wished she would go. Unfortunately, not a

word of his long speech was audible. Ria Mara saw only that Oliver's sweat-beaded forehead was twitching and that he was moving his parched lips. Jerry, standing at the head of the bed, finally caught the word : " Out." His eyes swollen with crying, his little nose red in a face that was haggard with loss of sleep, he got Ria Mara out of 168. The closing of the door sounded like thunder to Oliver's raw nerves. Immediately thereafter he lost consciousness again.

He knew by this time that there were two kinds of unconsciousness. A good, friendly kind that carried you off to pleasant pastures—Clearwater, a thousand silvery, jumping trout—Donka, Rhodes, the green bay of Rhodes—Oxford, the shadow of the tree outside the window on the wall of his room in college—and Donka again. This time she was swimming with him at Santa Monica—floating, flying, waterfalls, waves, showers of rain, coolness, dampness, buoyancy—that was the good unconsciousness.

The bad kind was dry and alive with terrors—wooden houses burning in Constantinople, straying in the desert, Jupiter lamps flashing up, people crowding around. Oliver was climbing up the wall of a house, mounting, mounting, mounting, in a panic of fear. When he had reached the roof, the house tilted and collapsed. The electric light signs came tumbling down—all of them tumbling, tumbling down. He was falling, falling, falling, falling. He knew that nothing could keep him from being dashed to atoms on the pavement below. But he woke up before that happened. " This isn't going to hurt," the nurse was saying, and laid a sandbag on his stomach. No grave could have been heavier.

From Friday evening to Sunday night Oliver screamed for Donka. It was a withered little scream—barely audible, barely intelligible—but a scream it was. He was yearning for her, waiting for her. Only her hand, only her presence, only to hear her say, " Puyu." Only Donka could help, only Donka, only Donka. There was not a nerve of his racked body, not an inch of his skin, not a point of his brain, not a beat of his heart that was not waiting for Donka. It seemed to him that he was not ill, was not hurt, was not suffering—that the only thing he needed to heal him was Donka. His eyes were open now and fixed on the door. He was careful not to let the white rectangle escape hin. He knew Donka was coming and that she would have to enter through that door. He was waiting for her. He was screaming for her.

Jerry cowered in the armchair, listening to that ceaseless,

ceaseless, unintelligible whispering and murmuring. He clung to Tobias—he held Tobias on his lap all night. Tobias was trembling. Jerry was trembling, too. It was one of those sweltering New York nights. Oliver screamed for Donka.

At two in the morning he gave it up. He closed his eyes. He grew quiet. Jerry wakened the nurse. The nurse summoned the physician in charge. The physician in charge summoned Dworsky. Dworsky drove up in his car. He was not in the best of humours. He had gone to bed at midnight, and his first operation was scheduled for six in the morning. He was clad only in pyjamas under his coat, and he washed his hands grimly.

"He's dying," whispered Jerry with quivering lips.

Dworsky drew Oliver's lids back and looked at his eyes. "Suppose he is," he snapped. "He doesn't need me for that. Everyone's got to die by himself. Besides, he's not dying at all. Cardiazol, please, nurse——"

Over at Liggett's Drug Store they had seen Dworsky's car drive up in the middle of the night. They stopped the poker game and went out to lie in wait on the pavement. A cat prowled along the kerb. An unsuspecting taxi rumbled by. An old newspaper rose like a lazy bird in the hot air and settled back into the gutter. McOlehan scurried across the street and vanished through the hospital door. His mouth glued to one of the drug store phones, a man was dictating a human interest story: "Headline: A Film Star Dies. Three exclamation points."

Just before two that morning Blakeley fainted. It was no sham faint, but a real one. They carried him to a corner of the set, opened the collar of his tattered uniform, and dashed cold water into his face. They bore him to the gymnasium and told the studio masseur to knead him back into shape. They had been driving themselves like madmen day and night. Blakeley was no longer young, and this film work was too much for his nerves. They would have to suspend activities for half an hour.

It was the last night of the shooting, and they were taking the scene in which Tatiana and her husband were haled before the summary tribunal of the revolution. Stage 12 had been cleared for the next film, and only the barracks where the tribunal met were left standing. Donka was wearing a ball gown—she had been carried off from the court ball in Petrograd

to appear before the commissars. Her dress too was torn to ribbons.

Meyer had the car waiting outside the stage to drive her to the flying-field. Airplane and pilot were waiting at the flying-field, ready to take off for New York. Eisenlohr was steeling himself against an outbreak as he approached Donka to break the news of the enforced interruption. There had been some thing so parched, so seared-looking about her all night. But she only laughed. "Half an hour—that's all right—Half an hour won't make any difference. Oliver's going to get well. I give you my word he'll get well the moment I'm with him. You let the newspapers frighten you out of your wits."

Eisenlohr stroked her shoulder soothingly. She seemed to him like a piece of heated glass. He had the feeling that she might burst and break into tinkling fragments at any moment.

"I'll get there in time," she said. "I'm sure of it. I got to Pasadena in time, too. I got him out of the train. I'll get him out of the hospital the same way. You can depend on it, Eisenlohr. What do you want?" she added, turning her head toward the hand on her shoulder and brushing her chin swiftly over the fingers. "Little in love with me, Herr Regisseur?" She laughed and shook the reassuring hand off.

"What's the matter with you?" he inquired cautiously. "Are you feverish?"

"Feverish? Why feverish? Because I'm gay when other people faint? No. Not feverish. A little cocained, that's all," she said, the back of her hand lifted in a significant little gesture toward her nostrils.

"You shouldn't do that, Donka."

"No, I shouldn't. But maybe you'll tell me what I should do to help me stick this out—this torture you're putting me through—this filthy picture of yours that isn't worth a damn, anyway—not a single damn. I'm holding the banner high—isn't that right? I'm sticking to the last minute. But I've got to do something—God, Eisenlohr, I've got to do something to help me stick it out."

"And yet you've been wonderful—all night—you've been magnificent, Donka."

"Yes? Have I?" she asked absently, then pulled herself together. "Was I good? I'm in a trance, you know. And I'm hoarse besides—haven't you noticed? I simply can't get my voice up."

She was lost in thought for a moment. Then: "Coffee, Takus," she cried. "Lots of coffee and newspapers!"

A curious atmosphere brooded over the stage and the shooting that night—something that froze and burned at one and the same time. The spots had not been turned off—costly current was being squandered during the half-hour's recess because Donka had declared she would tumble to the floor and fall asleep if the glare were dimmed by so much as a single lamp. The members of the tribunal had discarded their cloaks and were shooting dice in a corner. Eisenlohr was smoking as he paced furiously to and fro, automatically clearing the same cables over and over again. Donka was seated at the bare table of the tribunal and, in the background, Piluyeff had thrown himself flat on the ground for a half-hour's nap. Manuela, a gloved and hatted ghost, ready for departure, appeared with the coffee. Takus poured a cup for Donka and added some brandy. Eisenlohr drew nearer. "Me, too," he cried avidly.

Bill Turner came swiftly toward them across the empty stage. It was two-twenty, but he was still in the studio, with Sam Houston to keep him company.

"I've just phoned to New York," he said. "Everything's all right. He's asleep now."

"Yes?" said Donka. She finished her coffee. "You see, Bill, he's asleep. I'll get there in time. I got to Pasadena in time, too. It was one of your hellish pictures that day, too, going on and on and on, world without end. But Donka'll get there in time. And what Donka wants, she gets. Oliver isn't going to die. The papers, Takus."

Having fumbled about in his coat pockets, Takus laid a couple of newspapers on the table, while Granite leaned from behind to hand her a copy of the edition fresh from the press. No one had noticed that Granite was there, too. But—like Bill Turner, like Sam Houston—there he was. It may be that he merely dreaded the thought of returning to his deserted room with the toy railway. But the chances are that he was there for the same reason that had brought the other men—a lurking sense that they must lend Donka their support as long as she stayed at her post, stick it out with her as long as she stuck it out. Without turning her head, she took the paper from Granite and brushed his fingers lightly with her own. "Thank you, Buzz," she said gently. She spread the sheet flat in front of her and began reading the headlines. Presently she looked up. "Make yourselves at home, children," she smiled. "Have some coffee. Help me pass the time." She reached for Manuela's wrist in that time-worn gesture of hers

and glanced at the watch. "Mr. Blakeley, please God, will be restored to us in ten minutes. How long do you figure after that, Eisenlohr?"

"An hour and a half, if you keep on the way you're going."

Donka's eyes wandered from one to the other. She felt as though she were floating in a cloud of intoxication. Her smile deepened, and her shoulders moved in a little wriggle of satisfaction. "Nice that you're all here," she said.

Each of these men had been her lover for a brief period, and each of them had remained her friend. They were standing by her now, in this, the most difficult hour of her difficult existence—marching shoulder to shoulder with her in silent good comradeship. She stretched her limbs. She could feel her own power surging within her—power for good and power for evil—which was as it should be. She would get there in time. She had got to Padasena in time, too.

Her eyes went back to the paper and clung for a moment. "Look! Mara!" she sneered, pushing the sheet away like something unclean. "Our friend Ria Mara's getting plenty of publicity out of Oliver's illness. She's dressed in black—did you read it, Eisenlohr? She looks pale, but composed. Interesting, isn't it? Touching—I'm touched. She was gracious enough to grant some interviews. God, God, God, she was with Oliver! She's seen him, she's seen him, she's seen him, Bill."

Bill Turner flinched. There was an air of guilt about him. Donka had jumped up, trembling with rage. Her face looked venomous, with its mouth distended, and her voice sounded deeper and huskier than ever.

"What's she doing there?" she screamed. "How dare she go to Oliver? That slut, that cold fish, that scheming little beast! What's she doing while Oliver's dying? Business—that's what she's doing—business! She's doing the honours—that filthy little mess in black! She ought to get a job as reception clerk in a coffin factory, your Ria Mara——"

Aghast at her outbreak, the men had all leapt to their feet. She was pounding her fist against the paper now as though it were her enemy, and her screams were merging into laughter. They held their breath, waiting for the paroxysm of tears, the hysteria that was bound to follow. "Don't, Donka—don't," murmured Eisenlohr, taking hold of her arm and drawing her toward him. He still had more influence over her than anyone else. With trembling, conscience-stricken hands Takus was stuffing the papers back

into his baggy pockets. The men shooting dice in the corner had dropped their game and were straining their ears for every word, though—being minor actors, mere thirty-dollar-a-day men—they dared venture no closer. Only the figure of Erbacher emerged from the shadows to approach the table and fix inflamed eyes on the raging Morescu.

"This is more than jealousy," he was thinking. "This is the most profound antagonism, age-old antipathy. This is thrift against extravagance. Ice against fire. Abstinence against excess. Art against nature. Ria Mara against Donka Morescu."

Suddenly, unexpectedly, Donka fell quiet. "Smoke," she demanded hoarsely, and without further ceremony snatched Eisenlohr's cigarette from his mouth and drew the smoke deep into her lungs. There was something wild, gipsy-like, about the whole performance.

"What's Ria Mara going to do, anyway, if Oliver dies?" she inquired, almost singing with scorn. "She's impotent, you know."

The men turned to stare at her in dismay. "Yes," Donka continued, and Erbacher marvelled to see her pupils lengthen like a cat's. "Yes, she's impotent. She's worse than impotent. I've never talked about it. But she can't cry."

It was queer—the way she made that statement. She spoke of the thing as though it were a vice, a dark unmentionable stigma. Instinctively the heads drew closer about the table.

"She can't cry—no, she can't," sang Donka in her deep, scornful voice. "Just ask Granite. He'll remember. We played together a hundred years ago in *The Road to Hell*—Ria Mara and I. She was a grand actress from Broadway—literary, you know, and, oh, so cultured. And Granite had just dug me out of a show in the Bowery that was just a little worse than an honest brothel. And then came a scene where Ria Mara was supposed to cry; and she couldn't—she just couldn't. And the more she couldn't cry, the more stubborn she got. She wouldn't have glycerine—no—no glycerine at any price. She had heard something intellectual somewhere about the glycerine tears of the movie actors. And in those days they didn't have the things they blow into your eyes now. And so the production was stopped, and we all stood around waiting for Ria Mara to cry. Remember, Granite? They tried everything, everything—not a tear. She couldn't cry. She couldn't do what any extra girl can manage to do for seven

dollars. She hadn't feeling enough, she hadn't imagination enough, she couldn't concentrate enough to squeeze out two tears. It was awful having to watch her torture herself. Impotent. Absolutely impotent, do you see? I've seen plenty of loathsome spectacles in my life, but never anything quite so vile, so downright revolting as that. Finally Granite lost patience—didn't you?—you lost patience—and he mixed a cocktail—onion and horse-radish and ammonia—and held it to her nose as though she'd been a nasty little dog. And then the great Ria Mara cried a little. That's Ria Mara. I've never talked about it. I was ashamed. It was too obscene. And that's the woman—that impotent, calculating, shameless swine—that's the woman who's with Oliver now, while I've got to stay here and finish your damnable, damnable, damnable film. Where's Blakeley? It's enough to drive one stark mad —waiting around here——"

She broke off abruptly and stared past the lamps into the darkness of the stage where, under the red emergency light, the telephone had begun whirring. They were all staring in the same direction, as though they feared to approach the instrument. It was Erbacher finally who picked his way clumsily over the cables.

"It's New York," he said, the receiver in his hand, his head turned toward the group in the glare of the spots. "It's McOlehan. That was a false alarm before. Oliver's still alive, he says. He's conscious, he says."

"He's still alive," echoed Donka. "Why, was he dead?" It was strange to see her smile as she asked the senseless question.

At which point Blakeley appeared on the scene, his make-up the merest shade paler than it had been.

"Here I am," he said sullenly. "Let the fun proceed."

. . . . .

Oliver Dent died two hours before Donka Morescu reached New York. He had spent the preceding day in a condition of euphory, in a serene, confident, happy, effortless state, buoyed up by the hope of Donka's coming. She had telephoned to him three times—each time her plane had landed to refuel—and each time he had been conscious and had answered her. Not till the last day was he granted complete freedom from pain and consciousness—a darkness that led gently into deeper darkness. His hands lived longest, but at length they too lapsed into quiet.

The newspapers printed detailed accounts of Morescu's

arrival and of her meeting with Ria Mara. The pavement outside the hospital swarmed with people. The street bristled with cameras that were photographing the crowds, with newsreel men who included the photographers in their pictures, with still other photographers who were snapping the newsreel men. Morescu drove up in a dilapidated taxi, so that no one would believe at first that it really was Morescu. According to the newspapers, she was wearing a grey travelling costume and looked worn out. She had applied some rouge, on a harmless impulse, just after landing at the flying-field. She never used it when she looked well, but she had not wanted Oliver alarmed by her haggard appearance. The red cheeks were two senseless patches stuck to her white face. A few people removed their hats as she passed. As she placed her foot on the first step, the hospital door opened and Ria Mara emerged. The encounter had been well planned and came off admirably.

Ria Mara was in black, with a tiny black veil, and the shape of her little hat managed to convey indefinably the impression of widowhood. She was carrying a few white flowers—for decorative effect, apparently, since they served no other purpose—and moved with unfaltering composure toward the cameras planted at every available point. She was supported in her progress by a gentleman whose air of solicitude emphasised her stricken fragility. The gentleman was McOlehan, who had received instructions to make a great to-do over Ria Mara, since no choice was left them now but to star her in *Milestones*.

On the fourth of the seven steps the two women met, providing a choice tit-bit for the photographers. Ria Mara made a tentative movement to embrace Donka Morescu. But Donka walked straight past her into the building. She would have liked to spit at Ria Mara, but restrained herself out of deference to the claims of publicity. Ria Mara converted her tentative movement into a heartbroken gesture of greeting to the waiting crowd. " He's dead," she said with a single little lift of her hand. She was a great artist.

The supreme moment over, the taxi disgorged another figure—the frenzied figure of Manuela, hatted and gloved. She paid the chauffeur and followed her mistress into the hospital—Coco, the consolation cushion, clutched under her arm, and Amalie, the ample handbag, dangling at her side.

Ria Mara's well-timed appearance on the steps had been so

deliberately contrived, so significant, as to force upon Donka the realization that she had come too late. She had not known it, had not considered the possibility till that moment. The fates had been less propitious than at Pasadena. Oliver had waited for her, but she had failed him.

In the lobby Jerry fell on her neck—heavy as a sack and drained of tears. He said nothing, and she said nothing, and what indeed was there for her to say? She merely passed her hand lightly over his hair, which was soft as a child's, and pushed him away.

"Do you want to see him?" asked a nurse, who had been standing a little apart with some bed linen over her arm.

"Please."

All the doors looked alike, but the Negro Dan was stationed outside 168. He was wearing his correct butler's livery, and looked lighter than usual, which was his way of losing colour. There was dignity in his bearing, but he was smiling to-day too. He could not help himself.

"May I go in alone?" asked Donka as the nurse opened the door. Faintly aggrieved, the girl shrugged her shoulders and turned away.

The windows were open. The curtains fluttered in the draught and subsided again as the door closed. Donka was conscious of the heat pouring into the room, of the subdued roar of the city, of the noise made by a car being started outside. She could not find the bed immediately. She had always imagined it standing at the right of the room, with the headboard toward the window. She discovered it now in a little recess of the left wall, and tiptoed nearer.

What lay there was very beautiful—a grave, rather stern statue of some transparent yellow material—more delicate than marble, finer than alabaster. A silken, Christlike young beard covered mouth and chin. A few white flowers lay on the pillow. But there was nothing here that suggested Oliver. Nothing. Nothing. Donka brooded over that alien statue. She was no longer sensible even of love. Only now did she realize how completely the human being she had loved best in the world had gone from the world. Even outside the door she had still been hoping for something—for a torrent of tears to ease her pain, for an impulse to cast herself on that dead body, to shake the cold shoulders, to breathe on the quiet heart—some tremendous scene in which she might find release. Nothing of the kind. None of that was possible here. Such things happened in films, perhaps.

"Eisenlohr's right," she thought strangely. "The real thing's much less noisy. We all overact."

"Good-bye, Oliver," she whispered. Even that was theatrical.

Turning her eyes from the dead man, she caught sight of a little dog lying in the shadows not far from the bed. He lay on his side, his back slightly curved, his flanks drawn in, his paws outstretched. His coat, always softer and more delicate than became one of his breed, was now so discoloured and matted that she did not at once recognize him as Tobias. Reluctant to disturb the hushed peace of the room by calling to him, she drew a step nearer. Tobias gazed up at her out of waggish eyes. As she stood over him, still hesitant, a fly came buzzing along, circled about the dog's head once or twice, then settled itself on the dark, open eye, where, very much at home, it began washing its hands.

Donka retreated hastily. She tried to close the door quietly behind her, but the knob slipped from her grasp, and the door slammed.

Dr. Ploughfield, the pathologist of the Dworsky Clinic, who had already examined Oliver Dent's stomach and confirmed Dworsky's diagnosis of a *linitis plastica*, asked to be given the body of the little dog for dissection purposes. He established the rupture of a coronary artery as the immediate cause of death and even published a popular little article—based on this and analogous cases—entitled: "Is It Possible to Die of a Broken Heart?"

As for *Night of Destiny*, it was a moderate success. The critics found the action weak, Eisenlohr's direction superb, but Morescu's performance disappointing.

For the rest, she is still working in the films. But she is no longer a star.

THE END